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Opportunity or social class reproduction: making sense of community college programs through a study of the business programs of the Nova Scotia Community College

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**Opportunity or Social Class Reproduction:
Making Sense of Community College Programs Through a Study of the Business
Programs of the Nova Scotia Community College**

Submitted by Patrick Sherlock
for the degree of EdD of the
University of Bath
2002

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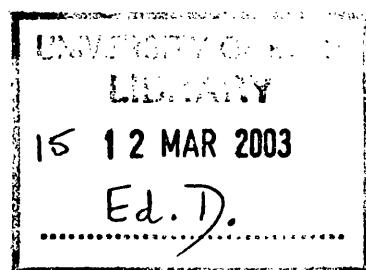
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Abstract

Opportunity or Social Class Reproduction: Making Sense of Community Colleges through a Study of the Business Programs of the Nova Scotia Community College

This research enquiry presents a study of business students and business programs at the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) to test the arguments of the advocates and the critics of community college education. The critics, represented by Clark (1960), Brint and Karabel (1989), Rhoads and Valadez (1996) argue that community colleges “cool out” the ambitions of students and track them into low-end jobs, replicating the class structure. On the other side are the advocates, such as Grubb (1999) and Shaw (1999) who contend that community colleges do meet their mandate of providing opportunity for students who are “experimenting” or “taking a second chance” on an education.

The open access and democratic values of the NSCC are called into question through an exploration of the high attrition rates in business programs. Further research on career ambitions and resulting employment is undertaken to test Karabel’s contention that working class students are streamed into an education that leads to working class jobs (1977).

The research methods used include both quantitative and qualitative data analysis to examine the meaning of a community college business education. It is argued that the multifaceted histories, lives, and career aspirations of business students of the NSCC need to be critically analyzed to foster an understanding of whether a community college education is an opportunity for educational and occupational success or a system of class perpetuation.

It is found that the situation at the NSCC is more complex than that described by the protagonists in the debate, as follows: (i) Students between the ages of 18 – 24 are most likely to be “experimenters” because they do not possess the cultural capital, as described by Bourdieu (1997), necessary to draw the links between postsecondary education and employment. (ii) High attrition rates represent a “cooling out” of student ambitions. However, (iii) community colleges provide a “second chance” for mature students. While one-year community college programs channel working class students into low-end jobs, community college two-year programs hold the hope of future opportunity through university articulation agreements and better employment preparation.

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Patrick Sherlock

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Chapter One

Introduction

This research enquiry employs quantitative and qualitative data analysis to examine the meaning of a community college business education. This goal is accomplished by using focus groups and questionnaires to explore the diverse business student population of the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC). The multifaceted histories, lives, and career aspirations of business students of the NSCC need to be critically analyzed to foster an understanding of whether a community college education is an opportunity for educational and occupational success or part of a system of class perpetuation. A case study of the business students will create the depth of understanding necessary to inform the practices of community colleges. Shaw (1999) states that in order to understand the community college culture one must start with an understanding of students.

It is only by first understanding the culture of the students that the process of organizational and individual transformation can yield significant outcomes for these students or the community college as a whole (Shaw, et al, 1999 p. 106).

The Nova Scotia Community College views itself as an intentionally comprehensive institution with a mandate of open access to serve diverse student populations ranging from those in need of adult literacy to those searching for advanced employment skills. Griffith and Connor (1994) in the following quote, reflect the view that community colleges are devoted to serving the students who have not found a place in university education.

They are dedicated to the discovery and development of human potential, often the potential of people whose abilities have been overlooked, people who have been passed over or passed along (Griffith and Connor, 1994, p.304).

The College claims to provide the opportunity for: (1) access to further education through academic upgrading and remedial programming; (2) occupational education for employment; (3) credits for transfer to university; (4) improvement in general education and life skills; (5) re-education and re-entry to the workplace; (7) acquiring practical skills for reverse transfer students from university to community college. The College hopes to serve students by providing a second chance at an education for those whose path has not been the direct high school to university route.

The Advocates and the Critics of Community College Education

An overarching goal of this research will be the use of focus groups and surveys to develop a case study of business students and business programs to examine the arguments of the advocates and the critics of community college education. This research on a microcosm of community college education is placed alongside the research of the critics of community college education, Brint and Karabel (1977 and 1986), Clark (1956 and 1960), Rhoads and Valadez (1996 and 1999), and the advocates, Dougherty (1996), Grubb (1999), and Shaw (2000). The critics of the community college argue that colleges “cool out” the ambitions of students as they track working class students into low paying jobs and replicate the class structure. The advocates contend that community colleges provide practical education and quality teaching that serves the needs of students who are “experimenting” or “taking a second chance” on an education. Dougherty (1996) believes that the diverse multifaceted nature of community colleges creates a need to serve a variety of stakeholders that include employers, students, universities, and other members of the community. The research on both sides of community college education will be presented to ask several questions. Do the business students of the NSCC fit the profile of the working class students described by the critics and the advocates of community college education? Are the outcomes of a community college education as described in the literature review evidenced in the NSCC business program?

Chapter Two introduces the reader to the brief history of the NSCC, which was first established in 1988. In addition to the presentation of the background of the NSCC and its accompanying business programs, a demographic profile of the business students is presented. The progression is from the larger body of Canadian community colleges to the NSCC and its campuses and students.¹ A literature review is presented that asks if community college students are “experimenters” who are unsure of their goals and of the program of study in which they are enrolled. This chapter also questions whether a large group of students would best be described as “taking a second chance” on education because of their first unsuccessful attempt at post secondary education. The chapter also presents the hypotheses and research questions rooted in the two competing views of the community college, as follows: The view of the critics that community colleges channel students into low end employment. This position is in contrast to the view of the advocates that community colleges create opportunity for upward mobility. This task of testing the competing hypotheses is accomplished by establishing the framework and environment of the NSCC, followed by the research and analysis.

Social Class in the Canadian Context

A premise of this thesis is a definition of social class based on occupation and its correlation with the educational credential that gives one access to a particular

¹ Research on Canadian community colleges is difficult to obtain. It is a relatively new system of post secondary institutions in Canada in the past thirty years. The NSCC established in 1988 was the first community college in Nova Scotia. The research for this thesis is drawn primarily from research on the American system of colleges, with the two primary sources being Jerome Karabel, who argues that community colleges perpetuate social stratification; on the other side is Norton Grubb, who challenges that community colleges provide opportunity for upward mobility to students who would otherwise not have had access to any post secondary education. The differences between the Canadian and American community colleges will be presented. It should be noted that the social, political, and economic climate of Canada and the United States are quite distinct.

class of careers that range from service sector, blue-collar/white collar,² management, and professional as one moves up the ladder. In the context of the NSCC and the broader system of community colleges, the unskilled service sector (e.g., waiter/waitress, fast-food server), with its accompanying minimal high school or less requirement is situated at the lower end of the occupation spectrum. This is particularly relevant to the students in the focus groups (eighty percent between the ages of 22 and 28) for this research who were leaving service sector jobs to complete a program at the NSCC with the hope of acquiring a white-collar position.

Blue-collar and white-collar tertiary positions are located above the service position; however, they are found below white-collar management careers. The hierarchy of educational credentials required to gain access to the classes of occupations: service, blue-collar/white-collar, management, professional are high school or less, community college, and university, respectively.

The above described social class ranking of occupations is explained by Sennett and Cobb (1972) in terms of the status of a job being measured by the degree of autonomy a person has and the perception by the individual and society of the value of production that results from the labour in that job. Occupation, education and income are in general correlated so that the better the education gained the higher the salary. However, Sennett and Cobb in emphasizing autonomy and status are drawing attention to the more subtle differences between unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, whether they are blue or white collar. For the NSCC students in the focus groups a service position with hours of work outside of the standard work-day and poor working conditions (week-ends in smoke-filled pubs or late nights at McDonald's) place the job in a lower class status. One of the reasons that focus group students viewed white-collar positions that offered similar salaries as more desirable was the relative increase in autonomy and opportunity for improved

² Sennett and Cobb argue that there is an intermixing of white- and blue-collar occupations based on the degree of autonomy found in a particular position as opposed to the over-all class of occupation.

quality of life.³ Sennett and Cobb describe this need for autonomy in white- and blue-collar positions in the following way:

The reason for the intermixing of white- and blue-collar work is, we think, that people measure the status of the ordinary occupations just as they measure status at the top. Occupations in which the individual possesses some degree of autonomy – that is, some degree of freedom from authority and from having to define his own function in terms of the shifting demands of others – are more desirable than jobs where a person has to deal with others and respond to them... This reasoning explains why at the bottom of the scale are found not factory jobs but service jobs where the individual has to perform personally for someone else (236-237).

Chapters Three, Four, and Five are devoted to the collection and interpretation of research data. Chapters Three and Four introduce the competing theses, research questions and objectives, which encompass an identification of the demographics of the business students, followed by an exploration of how and why they choose to attend the NSCC. Chapter Four identifies the research methodology of the focus groups and the survey instrument. Chapters Five and Six are devoted to an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative research data through a series of questions and analysis. Chapter Six presents detailed transcriptions and analyses of focus group responses.

Researching Attrition

Chapter Seven is a pivotal chapter that presents the research on the high attrition rates for two-year colleges in North America, and it focuses on the 44 percent attrition rate in the Business Administration program at the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC). The open access and democratic values of the NSCC are called into question through an exploration of the high attrition rates in business programs. The large group of community college “experimenters” is discussed in order to question how the personal decision to leave the NSCC is

³ Bowles and Gintis (1972) describe the authority structure in occupations from middle-class “self-direction” to working-class “conformity” as sources of social class differentiation.

viewed by the student as a positive or negative experience. When is leaving a positive or negative personal experience? When is leaving an institutional failure? Tinto (1987 and 1993) in his research on attrition contends that to understand whether we are witnessing student or institutional failure we must understand the education and career goals of the student and the institution, as presented in his definition of “dropout,” as follows:

Institutions should not define dropout in ways which contradict the students’ own understanding of their learning. If the learner does not define his/her own behavior as representing failure, neither should the institution (Tinto, 1987, p 133).

The above attrition issues that were identified by Tinto (1987 and 1993) are examined in this chapter through a presentation of retention policies and strategies designed to alleviate attrition, with particular emphasis on placement testing and remedial education within the NSCC, and its implications for the larger system of two-year colleges.

Research Enquiry Results

Chapter Eight, Research Enquiry Results, pulls together data and subsequent research analysis to test the competing hypotheses of the contradictory nature of the community college providing open access and serving an egalitarian function in contrast to the perpetuation of tracking into social classes. The impact of various stakeholders on the policy of community colleges; specifically, the influence of students, employers, and universities is examined.

Chapter Nine, The Conclusion, places the Nova Scotia Community College and the School of Business within the social, political and economic environment of the twenty-first century to allow an extrapolation to the larger institution of community colleges. A blueprint is presented for the future of business education at the Nova Scotia Community College, which includes specific recommendations for addressing further research dedicated to the needs of “experimenters” and “second chancers.” The final chapter revisits the question of whether community

colleges serve to keep working class students in working class jobs, or whether it provides meaningful employment through postsecondary education.

Chapter Two

Background

The College's *Raison d'être*

The Nova Scotia Community College was established in 1988 to provide skills training in support of the provincial economy. Since that time, the NSCC mandate has grown to include providing open access to a diverse student population, including those taking a second or third chance on education and those who are experimenting with a college education for the first time. The NSCC will serve a range of students from those who have a university degree to those who have not completed high school through the regular school system, but may have earned a General Educational Equivalency (GED). There is little doubt that the NSCC shares in common with community colleges throughout North America, as identified in Clark's research (1960), the fact that the majority of students are represented by the less academically well prepared.

Many junior colleges have an open-door admission policy, which brings them a cross section of the community; this means a heavy concentration from lower socioeconomic groups compared with most other colleges. The distribution of students' scholastic-aptitude-test scores may also be skewed toward the lower levels (Clark, 1960, p.27).

Grubb (1999) identifies two characteristics of community colleges as follows: First, the need to be comprehensive in serving a wide variety of students. Second, possessing an "entrepreneurial spirit-a willingness to accept new roles, an eagerness to expand into new "markets" (p. 7). These characteristics accurately describe the NSCC and explain the constant criticism of the College's efforts to serve too many diverse populations of learners resulting in an institution that is in a constant state of flux. This commitment to accessibility is evidenced in a quote from a recent article written by the President of the NSCC.

I am proud of our commitment to embracing both access and quality through a hybrid of the American and Canadian community college traditions...We are re-defining the comprehensive community college in a way that makes sense for a broad cross-section of Nova Scotia's population (Ray Ivany, president NSCC, June 2001).

Stakeholders, particularly faculty, are often frustrated by the broad expanse of the mission statement designed to serve all students through open admission. This mission requires an entrepreneurial spirit and acceptance of constant change. Unfortunately, these characteristics that most often define a strong and progressive college are viewed as indicators of poor leadership when not properly understood. Grubb (1999) argues that these college traits of open access and entrepreneurial spirit may create significant curriculum challenges.

This makes colleges more responsive to local communities and to changing economic and demographic conditions than many other educational institutions. But like the commitment to diversity, this entrepreneurial spirit has its cost. It creates colleges that are sometimes fragmented and incoherent, and the commitment to expanding enrollments and revenues undermines institutional support for teaching in several ways...And so the very attributes that make community colleges distinctive also create pedagogical challenges that often go unrecognized and unresolved" (Grubb, 1999, p. 7).

The mission statement of the NSCC is to provide employment skills and enjoyment of life. "Building Nova Scotia's economy and quality of life through education and innovation" (NSCC, Mission Statement, 2001). The College works toward meeting this goal through a strong commitment to teaching. A Faculty Member teaches an average of 20 to 24 hours per week, with committee and curriculum work, but no research requirements. The *raison d'être* of the college is to provide employment skills that enhance the quality of a student's life. Critics of community colleges, namely Clark (1960) and Karabel (1989) argue that students from lower class groups are prepared for lower class jobs as their ambitions are "cooled out."

The junior college in effect is asked to cool out the incompetent...The latent terminal student is allowed into transfer curricula but encounters counseling and testing that invite him to consider alternatives, subtle pressure to hedge his bet by taking courses that have a terminal destiny, tough talk in orientation classes about realistic occupational choice, probationary status perhaps, and finally grades that will not allow transferring. He can be let down gradually, in what can be interpreted as a process of gentle stalling (Clark, 1960, p. 163).

In the business program the curriculum and teaching are focused primarily on preparation for employment. Grubb (1999) challenges that the critics of the community college, "Brint and Karabel (1989), Pincus (1980), Zwerling (1976 and 1989), and Clark (1960) make no mention of teaching in any of their diatribes" (p. 11). Grubb argues that given the community college's mandate is to teach, there should be an effort in the research to understand and evaluate teaching in the colleges, as illustrated in the following quotation:

There's almost no information about what teaching looks like in the "teaching college." Teaching is invisible in several senses then: Not only does it take place behind closed doors, out of sight of other instructors, but it has never been the subject of a sustained description, or any analysis of what happens, or why it looks as it does. The lack of evidence has been a central motive for our writing. It's difficult to think about improving the quality of these institutions, enhancing their responses to the need for more remedial and ESL, or understanding how "cooling out" takes place without knowing more about what instructors do and what shapes their teaching" (Grubb, 1999, p. 11).

History of Business Programming

Business programming has a long history that precedes the College's founding in 1988. In the 1960s the Regional Vocational School offered a one-year Secretarial program. In the 1970s a two-year Business Administration program was introduced that included courses in Organizational Behaviour, Marketing, Accounting, Business Math, Business Communications, Typing, Computers,

Economics, Law. In the late 1970s the two-year course became a one-year Business Administration program. In the early 1990s the one-year Business Administration program was revised and more computer courses were included in the curriculum; the program became Business Information Technology. The one-year Business Information Technology certificate program was replaced in September 2001 by a new two year Business Administration diploma program. The Business Steering Committee, comprised of faculty and department heads, recommended the change from the certificate program to the diploma program as a response to research conducted by the College, indicating employers perceived BIT graduates as inadequately prepared to enter the job market. The next significant change occurred in September 2001 when the new two-year Business Administration program was implemented.

The current Business Information Technology program is offered at 12 campuses with enrollment typically around 1000 students for the College. Demand for the program has remained fairly constant across the College with the exception of several rural campuses. The attrition rate has also been consistently high at approximately 44 percent for the BIT program. The high attrition rate is often attributed to the large number of “experimenters” and the “open admission” policy. The premise is that many students select the program to explore the College through the vehicle of a practical business program.

The employment rate for the program is high, with the highest rate being in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). A recent graduate follow-up survey reported that over 80 percent of BIT graduates found employment, and 73 percent found employment directly related to the business area (NSCC, Graduate Follow-Up Survey, 2001). The same survey reported that the average salary is \$18,019 for a student with a one-year BIT certificate. The employment rate increases to 92 percent for general employment and 81 percent for employment related to the area of study for students who stay one more year after BIT to complete an additional

one-year business diploma (a total of two years of community college education). The average salary increases to \$23,961 for a graduate of a one-year diploma. A student who remains for an additional year increases his or her chances for general employment by 12 percent. The increased chance of employment in the business area is 8 percent, with an average increase in salary of \$5,942. Despite these positive findings, over 50 percent of BIT graduates elect not to continue their studies by entering a second level business option at the NSCC. In 2001, two hundred and twenty-five students or 43 percent from the graduating BIT class of five hundred and twenty-three choose to enroll in a second level business diploma.

A Changing Social, Economic, and Political Context

The NSCC has followed the lead of most North American community colleges and responded to the social, political, and economic climate of the new century by creating new programs of study. These programs in areas such as digital imaging, graphic design, applied arts, video animation, computer programming, and many others no longer have the pejorative labels attached to them that were often associated with the trade preparation for the modern economy. These postmodern courses are less assembly line, Fordist economy courses. It may even be argued that the traditional nature of stability that universities are known for makes them less responsive to the changing social, political, and economic workplace. This postmodern genre is less a part of the NSCC School of Business, which prefers to follow, and envy or aspire to replicate, the business programs of universities, which results in more traditional programming and delivery.

A Profile of the NSCC Business Students

Who are the students of the Business programs of the Nova Scotia Community College? What are their needs? Why do they choose a business education? The faculty who have worked with and taught the students for many years believe that the typical community college student doesn't fit the stereotype of a college/university student. The stereotype of the student who directly, or one or

two years, out of high school selects a program with the support of family is very rare. The student who is five to six years out of high school represents most NSCC business students. They are often uncertain of what the future holds for them in the areas of education and employment. They select programs based on limited information.

Students fall into three categories, as follows:⁴ The student in his or her mid-twenties, who is returning to education for a variety of reasons, represents the largest category. These students have worked at low-paying jobs, attended university, dropped out, become parents, required time for health or family issues. They are serious about their education and often have a plan to succeed at this “second chance.” Funding agencies sponsor many of these students. This group is most likely to have learned of the College through word-of-mouth from friends and relatives. They are often very committed to their studies and, as a result, they experience success. They socialize with peers in the class and find it a fairly easy transition to the college experience. They are looking for opportunities, so some will still be “experimenting” with educational paths. Most still have time enough to explore and commit to two years of study by taking a second level option.

The second group of students is much more difficult to describe because they represent a multitude of life circumstances that have brought them to the College. They are older, over 25, and often bring many challenging problems with them. They are a large group who defy categorization. They may be recovering alcoholics, disabled, displaced, or in a life or career transition. They are looking for a new start, a second or perhaps a third chance at education. Their personal life circumstances may present barriers that they must overcome to succeed at their studies. This group is also initially apprehensive about their decision to return to education, wondering if there will be other students their age. They quickly see students who look like them, and they establish a degree of comfort

⁴ These profiles and categories of students are based on college-wide NSCC demographic data reported for students for the class of 2001/2002.

through meeting others who share similar experiences, as expressed in this quote from a mature student:

I mean that I was out of school for 20 years. I was nervous about going to school. I had grown kids and I'd been out of school for 20 years. I walked in on the first day, shaking like a leaf. I looked around and there are other old folks like me. It felt terrific! (rural student).

For some students this is the first time that they have felt this degree of comfort in an educational setting. High school and university may have been uncomfortable experiences. The community that they find with students at college who share similar life experiences, social and economic, forms a strong bond. The age of the students and the level of maturity create a more inviting experience. Two students that I spoke with in a focus group at a rural campus said that they were taking their third program and would take a fourth program if they could. The reason given was that they felt at home and accepted at their campus. It is not unusual to have a student who takes a variety of programs at a campus as he or she explores different areas of study in a safe and accepting environment. Often their background education is weak or forgotten. Their personal support structure may be dismal or nonexistent; it may be actively working against their success. This may come in the form of children who are in a subsidized day-care or an abusive husband who shows up demanding that his wife leave the class to come home. A typical business class at the NSCC will be represented by many of the problems associated with lower income groups. There will be students struggling against a former life on the street, alcohol and drug addiction, medical and physical challenges. These students will often be sponsored by outside agencies. They usually require additional resources devoted to them in the form of student services counseling and tutoring. The development of self-esteem and the more rudimentary development of self-efficacy and self-respect are their most immediate needs. Self-efficacy is best described as the feeling a person has that he or she is deserving of the opportunity to succeed. Self-respect is the student's belief that he or she can achieve, and they deserve the success they earn. Unfortunately, students are all too familiar with suicide attempts, depression, and

other mental illnesses. Despite the many personal challenges faced by these mature students, they tend to persist and graduate. They have a lower attrition rate than the rate for younger students.

The third group of students consists of those directly out of high school, or one to three years out of high school. They have the highest attrition rate at close to 50 percent. They are most “at risk” of not completing, and they may also be the most likely to be “experimenting” with a college business education. They are often uncertain of their choice or the choice that was made for them by their parents. This confusion leads to the challenge to find purpose and direction in their studies.

A subgroup of this group that I identified in the focus group sessions is the student who attended one year of university and was not successful. The reason most often given for selecting university was that family and friends expected it. They explained that they realized that they were not ready to attend university. They say that the large classes and the anonymity of university made it even more difficult for them to make an adjustment to university. Some students have decided on community college because they realize that there are only low paying jobs available to them. Others are told by parents that they want them to return to education. Several students said that their parents were not prepared to support them unless they returned to education. Most often a business program is seen as a low risk experiment, given that it provides useful skills that are highly transferable. Business is therefore a low risk chance at an education. It appears more practical than a university Bachelor of Arts, because it doesn’t require the large commitment of time required to earn a business degree at a four-year university.

The NSCC also offers advanced diplomas under the School of Business in the Human Resource Management and Public Relations programs. A university

degree is the prerequisite for entry to these programs, which are consistently over-subscribed.

Serving Under-Prepared Students

Grubb (1999) presents the idea that it is important to examine teacher comments to understand attitudes and conceptions about the role of the community college in serving under-prepared students. He concludes that instructors tend to fall into two categories. The first are those who argue that under-prepared students should not be in college. “Some instructors – relatively few, we should emphasize – simply believe that these students shouldn’t be in college” (Grubb, 1999, p 141). The second, larger group of faculty is understanding of the struggles of students. “These instructors best exemplify the premise that the community college should be a place where good students are *created* rather than *selected*” (Grubb, 1999, p. 142). Shaw (2000) agrees with Grubb and proposes that faculty deconstruct their perceptions and assumptions about students in the following way:

When we create educational structures that prepare students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds for nonprofessional careers without stressing their potential to assume leadership positions in a variety of social institutions, a representation of class is made (Shaw, 2000, p. 107).

Grubb (1999) draws a significant link between the approach to teaching and student success. He contends that the college cannot continue with the style of teaching that contributes to student failure and high attrition rates.

The success of instructors in this “last chance” role depends on what they do in the classroom, on their doing something other than replicating the mistakes of students’ past schooling” (Grubb, 1999, p 143).

In the focus groups that I conducted students spoke of their dissatisfaction with the lecture style of learning they had experienced in university. They have come to the community college to receive practical, “hands on” education. “*BIT is about learning hands-on, job skills that’s why I came here, instead of university*” (rural student). It was clear that students see the opportunity to participate in their

learning, through activity rather than listening as the reason why they were not successful at university and the advantage of a community college education. Students point to the large university class sizes and the impersonal nature of the university.

Yeah, I went to university, and I don't want to go again. I was in large classes and no one knows when you come to class. And I didn't want to be uptight for two or three years and say, "This isn't for me, and I wasted my money." One year, I can definitely do that. I can waste one year, and it won't be that much of a financial drain. If I really like it, then I'll come back for another year to get a diploma. The big thing is that I know that I can get a good start on a business career with the BIT certificate (urban student).

These are the students who first experimented with university and are now taking a second chance on education. At university, they discovered an environment where they find it difficult to achieve. They believe the community college will provide a different learning experience. Grubb's research shows that 82 percent of community college occupational classes followed an "authoritative" approach to teaching, where the instructor's interpretation is key (1999). Three basic strategies were used by instructors, as follows:

One was simply to lecture, let students take notes, assign reading and writing, test or grade students on it, and let the students' grades fall where they may; these instructors tended to grade on a curve. In such classes, students' success depended heavily on the abilities that they brought with them to the classroom, and these instructors were often the ones who complained about under-prepared students...A second strategy was to simplify the material to a level where students were able to memorize it...a final strategy was to enrich the classroom with a variety of materials, but without ever letting go of the instructor's prerogative to determine their meaning (Grubb, 1999, p. 166).

The presentation of the NSCC's background and current mandate, along with identification of the students and the learning environment established the framework to test findings of the critics and advocates of community college

education. The next chapter will present the two competing views of community college education and identify the hypotheses to be tested.

Notes

1.Didactic Delivery: There is a strong emphasis on the “covering” of material in the School of Business, with 12 campuses and approximately 1000 students there is a need for consistency of delivery of curriculum. Most courses are at an introductory level and easily segmented into small “bits” of information for transmission to students. This mode of delivery does not match the most successful adult learning practices, and it does not contribute to the education of learners in problem solving and critical thinking (See the discussion in Chapter Nine on Attrition and Teaching Methodology).

2.Virtual Delivery: The School of Business hopes to have all of its courses on-line by September 2002. Virtual delivery may contribute to greater isolation among faculty and students. Also, the greater emphasis on individual course delivery as opposed to program delivery may further increase the isolation. Virtual delivery markets itself as highly self-directed and student-centered; however, the courses tend to be didactic in the presentation of factual material. Rather than being innovative, they often take the form of computer workbooks. On the positive side, virtual courses may provide the flexibility required by students who are unable to attend classes because of family, financial, transportation and other constraints. The importance of understanding these practical restrictions as experienced by working class students will be discussed under Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus.”

3.Experience of Instructors: Instructors with the NSCC are required to have a minimum of five years of work experience. The result is students see the instructor as an expert. Given this status, many students will not question positions and choose instead to be passive. The result may be a more didactic style of teaching. Business teachers will often illustrate points by drawing upon their personal experience. While there are many benefits to having experienced faculty who are recognized by students as experts in their areas, there are also disadvantages. One disadvantage is that students may be reluctant to share their experiences. Students are often so enthralled by the instructor’s occupational stories that they fail to challenge or place material into their own personal context. Grubb reports that effective delivery incorporates a student’s work experience. Students often have their own experiences to contribute, either from everyday life or from their work lives. Since occupational students are often employed in jobs related to their occupational subjects (albeit at lower levels than they hope to obtain), occupational instructors can draw on a range of work experiences within their classroom discussions (Grubb, 1999, p. 105). The tendency is for students to become dependent on instructors to solve problems for them. Their dependent behaviour creates more dependence, which leads to instructor-centered learning. The instructor demonstrates a skill, which the students attempt to replicate. This style of learning prepares students for entry-level positions; however, it is detrimental for those who wish to advance to more senior positions in business where creative thought and independent thinking is required. “Occupational instruction differs from academic instruction in part because it serves two masters: the students and the employer or workplace” (Grubb, 1999, p. 12).

Chapter Three:

Competing Views of the Role of Community Colleges

There are two competing views, in the literature, concerning the role of community colleges. On the one hand, there are those such as Karabel (1977), Brint and Karabel (1989), Clark (1960), and Valadez and Rhoads (1996) who situate the role of community colleges within an understanding of education as closely linked to social class reproduction. On the other hand, Grubb (1999) explicitly rejects the view that community colleges serve to reproduce the personnel required for working class jobs. From these contrasting views, hypotheses can be constructed to see whether the NSCC conforms either to the views of those who see community colleges as part of the process of social class reproduction or to those, such as Grubb, who see community colleges as part of a democratic opportunity for a second chance education.

Before reviewing the arguments of critics and defenders of community colleges it should be noted that while the literature, which has been used to identify the competing hypotheses, discussed in this research enquiry, comes from the United States, the nature and function of the NSCC is different in some respects, and this may have an effect on how the results are interpreted. For example, the issue of preparation of students for transfer to university or terminal preparation for employment would be a major difference.

Transfer from the NSCC to university is relatively new; there is no system of junior colleges similar to the American colleges that prepare students specifically for transfer to university; however, articulation agreements between the NSCC and universities are being negotiated and this research will show that it is assuming greater significance. The area of similarity concerns the high rate of attrition that exists for both American colleges and the NSCC. The attrition rate for the NSCC business programs was 44 percent for 2001. When the NSCC attrition rates are placed in the broader context of the rates for the American

colleges, it is important to note that the attrition rate for the NSCC is not associated with a student not transferring to a four-year university. The most significant reason for a student not completing the business program may be tied to the large number of students who are 'experimenting' with a business education and deciding that they have chosen a program that they are not interested in pursuing. Although the statistics on leavers are not based on a large population (most students exit with minimal contact with faculty or support staff), the reason most often given is: "The program was not what I wanted." However, rather than seeing attrition as just a matter of individual choice, Brint and Karabel (1987) argue that attrition is a necessary process in the maintenance of social order:

Furthermore, terminal vocational programs spoke – and speak – to an obdurate truth in the history of the junior college: that most of their students in fact never transfer to a four-year institution. That this high rate of attrition, however painful to individual students, may very well be functional for the existing social order is a possibility that those who wish to reform the community college must squarely face (Brint and Karabel, 1989, p 232).

Brint and Karabel (1989) contend that community colleges do not live up to their claim of democratizing higher education when one considers the employment opportunities for graduates. The authors note that there is far more ambition than there is jobs to meet the needs of graduates. They recognize that, in principle, community colleges should be seen as open access democratizing institutions but argue that they are caught in a range of contradictory demands, which render them open to the overbearing demands of the capitalist economy:

Like the American high school, the community college over the course of its history has attempted to perform a number of conflicting tasks: to extend opportunity and to serve as an agent of educational and social selection, to promote social equality and to increase economic efficiency, to provide students with a common cultural heritage and to sort them into specialized curriculum, to respond to the demands of subordinate groups for equal education, and to answer the pressures of employers and state planners for differentiated education, and to provide a

general education for citizens in a democratic society and technical training for workers in an advanced industrial economy (p. 10).

In order to make good their argument that community colleges are implicated in the reproduction of social class they develop an account in which community colleges are caught between the demands of students and employers. They argue that working class students view education in terms of immediate needs while employers apply pressure for CCs to provide courses that answer to their short term needs. The result in both cases is that while those that drop out serve the demand for unskilled work, those that graduate fill the demand for semi-skilled work.

The Links Between Community College Education and the Labour Market

Brint and Karabel (1989) present two models of colleges as vocational trainers. The first model is the consumer-choice model where the student chooses college programs based on potential job opportunities. The student weighs the costs and benefits of fees and job opportunities from the college program. In one of the focus groups conducted for this thesis, students indicated that they were unwilling to commute a short distance of 15 kilometers because of the added cost of daycare and two lost hours of part-time work while traveling.

In this view, students also seek to maximize the return on the fees they pay. Brint and Karabel (1989) contend that it is the need to convert fees into jobs that has lead to shorter programs:

According to this perspective, the enormous growth in community college vocational programs reflects the shift in the preference of hundreds of thousands of educational consumers. The aggregate consequence of all these individual shifts is the increasing predominance of occupational training in the two-year college (p. 13).

The second, business-dominated model, sees the programs of colleges being shaped by business interests. So, for example, through industry advisory committees the NSCC provides an opportunity for business interests to influence

the curriculum. The driving force behind the change to a two-year Business Administration program is the claim by industry that a one-year business program was not sufficient to prepare students for employment. The industry 'research' that lead to this decision was primarily informal discussions with members of the business community. To put in perspective the power of business to influence the community college curriculum, it is worth noting that while business owners were claiming that students were poorly prepared, they hired 73 percent from the business area and 82 percent from the NSCC, overall. Despite these strong employment statistics, the NSCC changed the program. It could be argued that, of course, employers will say graduates require more education at the taxpayer's expense for their own benefit, as Brint and Karabel (1989) do:

Seeing in vocational education an opportunity to train at public expense a labor force of narrowly educated but technically competent middle-level specialists, to tailor the community college to its particular needs...And especially since the mid-1970s, business has influenced (occasionally directly, but more often indirectly) the shape and content of the curriculum from which community college students select their programs (p. 14).

There are two points to note about these explanatory models. The first is that, as we shall see, employers' pressure for a two year program has actually resulted in opportunities for greater income for the graduates of these programs, which it could be argued runs counter to the Brint and Karabel view. However, the significant theoretical points to arise from these models are that they take into account context and the micro politics of employer pressure. They stand, therefore, in contrast to human capital theory. According to this theory, human beings invest in themselves through education, expecting as a consequence a higher return through income for their investment. According to Woodhall (1997):

The results of all these (rate of return) studies confirm that expenditure on education does represent investment in human capital, and that it is a profitable investment, both for the individual and for society, although some critics deny that the earnings of educated workers provide an

adequate measure of the economic benefits of education (p. 220).

The assumptions underlying this theory include the idea that human beings are rational egoists, that is they are primarily motivated to pursue their self-interest through achieving greater income and that the links between education and the labour market are transparent. What the Brint and Karabel model of consumer led demand suggests is that both these assumptions are questionable. The consumers in their model are grounded in local contexts in which they ‘trade-off’ opportunities for greater income against family responsibilities, friends and the time they feel they can afford to be out of the labour market. In such a model locality and the price of courses taken become relevant. In their case the links between fees, programs and future job opportunities may be clear since the courses are short and local knowledge will tell them that gaining a certain certificate or diploma will enhance their job prospects; although, this is an assumption that remains to be tested in this study. However, what may be less clear to them is the link between the culturally valued knowledge gained in higher education and its connection to high status, high income jobs. This poses a fundamental problem for community colleges and is discussed after the following section.

A further argument that explains the class based nature of community colleges concerns the issue of ‘cooling out’. We have seen that Brint and Karabel assume that high rates of attrition are functional for the capitalist system. In this they echo Burton Clarke’s classic (1960) paper.

“Cooling Out” Community College Students

Burton Clark (1960) contends that community colleges serve to “cool out” student ambitions. The high rate of attrition in the business program, 44 percent, could be used as evidence of the “cooling out” process taking place at the NSCC. This “cooling out” is further complicated by the new post admission testing process, at

NSCC, which began in September 2001. The testing is designed to understand the level of prior knowledge that students have on entry and then to provide them with the appropriate level of program. (Testing and tracking are explored in Chapter Seven.). This form of tracking will take place after the students are admitted to the Business Administration program. Karabel's (1977) research revealed that selection takes place within colleges as students are tracked into specific programs:

What has been less frequently noted is that tracking also takes place within the community college. Two-year public colleges are almost always open door institutions, but admission to programs within them is often on a selective basis (p. 240).

Karabel (1977) would argue that one would find a distinct social class difference depending on the program of study at the community college. The point being that if we see community colleges as having a broad educational mission then not all students will be working class nor will they all necessarily be placed in low skilled jobs. Social class differences between programs, campuses, and colleges may be a reality of the diverse nature of community colleges. To attempt to control, or account for all of the many variables that define community colleges as multifaceted, multilayered institutions would not be possible. The changing nature of the community colleges as they respond to social, political, and economic influences means that they must be studied within the context of the current period. For example, when Karabel explored American colleges and universities the division of responsibilities was much more sharply defined. Universities did not view preparation for employment as their direct concern. As we begin the twenty-first century in Canada this division is becoming blurred. Funding to universities and colleges is more and more being tied directly to the success of graduates in finding employment.⁵ Moreover, at the NSCC, university graduates now take diploma level courses in order to enhance their employability.

⁵ An article in the Toronto Sun, March 7th, 2001, stated that the Ontario government plans to tie funding to post secondary institutions directly to the number of graduates who find employment. This article praised community colleges for their focus on employment and challenged universities to meet the needs of the marketplace.

This research enquiry is focused on business, which may have a social class bias that is unique to the program. Within a community college, including the NSCC, it could be hypothesized that as one moves from trades to technologies, to applied arts, to business programs, differences in social class will be noted. However, overall, it might be expected that students at community colleges will be of lower social class than those at university. Karabel (1977) argued that a community college should have a large percentage of students from lower social groups, if one accepts that community colleges are for the most part, still at the lower end of the post secondary hierarchy. This would suggest that the blurring between classes will be limited so long as vocational knowledge is seen as inferior to the culturally valued knowledge of universities.

We should now look at a further explanation for the class based view of community education, which is that primarily the type of knowledge that it seeks to transmit, is not part of the culturally valued knowledge which represents the 'mainstream'.

Border Knowledge

Rhoads and Valadez (1996) introduce a concept of knowledge that resides outside of the cultural mainstream called *border knowledge*. "Border knowledge is essentially a form of cultural capital unworthy of exchange in mainstream educational settings" (p. 7). The deficit of mainstream cultural capital represents the *border knowledge* that students bring to the college; also, the sense that colleges teach non professional vocational education (i.e., they don't teach medicine, architecture or law) the type of educational capital they acquire is marginal.

Border knowledge can be contrasted with Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1997) argues that with the development of social democracy and the redistribution of income through progressive taxes, including wealth taxes, the middle class had to develop new strategies in order to pass on their

intergenerational privilege. This he argues was achieved through the “hereditary transmission of cultural capital” (p. 48) in which the culture of the professional middle class home is consistent with the culture of the educational schools and universities. Therefore, the sons and daughters of the middle class succeed because they are immersed in a culture that is arbitrarily defined as valuable while working class and ethnic minority students fail. It is for this reason that his notion of cultural capital can be seen as the basis of a critique of human capital. Human capital theory is an individualistic account of educational success and failure. If individuals succeed in education it is because they have the genetic intelligence and motivation to succeed. Those that aren’t motivated are seen as somehow ‘wrongly wired’ since they do not pursue what they know to be in their best interests. In such an account social class has no role to play. In the following quote Bourdieu accounts for the role that education plays in reproducing social class through recognition that cultural capital is exchanged by the professional middle social classes for academic success:

From the very beginning, a definition of human capital, despite its humanistic connotations, does not move beyond economism and ignores, *inter alia*, the fact that the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family (Bourdieu, 1997, p.48).

Echoing this view Rhodes and Valdez, (1996) comment:

Instead of money being traded for goods, cultural knowledge is exchanged for academic success. Those with the “wrong” cultural capital, those possessing border knowledge, tend to do poorly (Rhoads, et al, 1996, p.14).

In contrast to the elite universities which attract those with cultural capital, Rhodes and Valdez (1996) contend that community colleges as open-access institutions attract culturally diverse students who understand that their knowledge will more likely be accepted by the community college over the university:

Community colleges are supposedly open-access institutions and, in an idealized sense, represent higher education's commitment to democracy. As such, they attract a great diversity of the border knowledge culturally diverse students bring with them, understanding the shortcomings of the canonization of knowledge is imperative to constricting democratic community colleges (p. 7).

The consequence is that in theory the cycle of reproduction is closed. Working class and ethnic minority students with border knowledge are attracted to community colleges because they appear more open to them, the knowledge they gain though is low in the hierarchy of what is valued and that is what they acquire and leave with.

As this research will make clear, students struggle with the idea that university degrees are given greater weight even by the NSCC. So they are concerned to defend the College's legitimacy as a post secondary institution. Lisa, a BIT student, recalled how when she was asked where she attended school by a customer service person at a local gym, she replied, "*Just* community college." Her mother, who was close by, challenged Lisa for her self-demeaning tone and words. It further illustrates that there is a two-tiered system of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia with universities occupying the top position and community colleges on the bottom.⁶

Given this cycle Rhoads and Valadez (1996) set themselves the task of asking how it can be broken, by changing community colleges to critical 'multicultural' organizations, where multicultural; is understood as an institution that crosses the

⁶ The case of this particular student points up some of the ambiguities in terms of students' views of the college and of their own lives. This student felt that she was 'just' at the NSCC but she went on to say when challenged that she felt that she would get a good job and earn as much money as a university graduate. She didn't feel marginalized or directed toward a lower paying job because her husband, a recent NSCC technology graduate, had such a high paying job that she could afford to attend college on his salary. The data presented in chapter 5 suggests she may be mistaken about this. Her views also suggest that she is prepared just to go to college because she is relying on/ or has been encouraged by her husband to do so -a patriarchal context for her decision making?

borders between different types of knowledge and understanding, irrespective of the way it is valued.

Our focus is both on the underlying organizational culture or structure (the frame and foundation of the house) as well as its most visible representation – the curriculum. To understand where our work must head, we need to come to terms with the canonization of knowledge (p. 13).

In their view failure to do so leads to a failure to equip students for key leadership roles in society:

When we create educational structures that prepare students from lower socioeconomic classes for nonprofessional careers without stressing their potential to assume leadership positions in social, political, and economic institutions, a representation of class is made (p. 26).

The questions to be addressed, therefore, are: How can community colleges prepare low-income students for vocational careers and develop critical thinking skills? How can students' border knowledge be recognized and the multiplicity of voices embraced? These are questions to which we will return in Chapter Nine having considered the implications of our research study.

Taking a Second Chance on an Education

Grubb (1999) states that colleges do “democratize” higher education by offering more opportunity for those who would not normally be able to attend university. He recognizes that the students attending community colleges will, most likely, be working class students but emphasizes the second chance opportunities that colleges provide:

Because they are open-access institutions-without an admission process requiring academic qualifications-they have often been called “second-chance” institutions, providing a second crack at higher education for students whose motivation and performance in earlier schooling were inadequate to gain them admission to four-year colleges. For both reasons, community colleges have high proportions of lower-income and minority students” (Grubb, 1999, p. 3).

While Grubb acknowledges that community colleges are likely to have a high proportion of working class students he does not see them as purely classed institutions, students from across the board who were poorly motivated at high school can make use of them. Moreover, a fundamental purpose of such institutions is that they exist to give students a 'second crack' at getting into higher education institutions, i.e. universities. In these respects, he sees such institutions as essentially democratic in providing students with the opportunity for upward mobility. However, Grubb has to acknowledge and explain why there is such a high attrition rate amongst these students. In order to do this he develops a concept of 'experimentation'. But before this is examined we need to place Grubb's views into the context of the NSCC.

In Nova Scotia, students who cannot attend university have the option of attending the NSCC, which is both more conveniently located and less expensive. Nova Scotia is known for having the largest ratio of universities per capita for North America; as a result, 83 percent of the post secondary students enroll in university, with only 17 percent choosing community college. In the United States and the rest of Canada the division is approximately 50 percent. The province of Alberta has a split of 2.9 : 3.5 for college and university participation, with the provincial government investing \$221 per capita in its colleges. Nova Scotia, on the other hand, has the lowest level of college participation in the country at 1 : 5 for college to university, coupled with the lowest rate of government funding for colleges at \$80 per capita (Statistics Canada, 2001). There are two points to be made here. Firstly, the NSCC may be atypical of other Canadian community colleges for this reason, but the fact that it also has the lower funding should also alert us to Bowles and Gintis' (1976) argument that working class institutions are likely to receive less funding, thereby emphasizing the class nature of community colleges. However, Grubb also argues that the second chance nature of community college students extends to mature students:

The status of community colleges as "second-chance" institutions also rests on their importance for older students-not only those who failed to enroll earlier in their

lives, but also those deciding to take a different course, women joining the workforce after a divorce or after their children are grown, individuals bounced out of promising careers through no fault of their own, and displaced workers affected by economic dislocations such as the decline of manufacturing (or timber or mining in specific regions) or the cyclical variations in defense and aerospace employment” (Grubb, 1999, p. 3).

The business students of the NSCC represent a wide variety of those taking a “second chance” on education. The largest single group of business students is the 20 to 29 year olds, representing 80 percent of the business student population.⁷ They may return to education at the community college after taking time out to work; they may not have followed the most expected route of high school students in Nova Scotia and gone directly to university from high school; they may have married at a young age and/or have children to support; they often have personal and/or financial problems. The Community College may provide an opportunity for students to restart their education. Many are supported by funding agencies that are encouraging the students to take programs based on employment opportunities and income potential.

These students include those who have returned to college because they want to leave low-paying jobs with little promise of advancement. For example, one student from the focus groups (Chapter Six) commented, *“I can easily make \$24,000 as a waitress but I hate the job. With this program I’ll have a career, and the average starting salary is \$27,000”*. There are students who had to take time-out to have children, usually waiting until their child is old enough to enter daycare. Students over 30 represent approximately 10 percent of the business student population. They may return for a variety of reasons including career

⁷ GenXers in the year 2000 range in age from 20-35, representing the majority of students in Canadian Community College classrooms. They have grown up as consumers of music, videos, internet and technology. A rather pessimistic and conservative view of these students, not supported by this research, is presented by Sacks (1996) who contends that they view themselves as consumers of education who are entitled, because of tuition payments, to good grades and

displacement and/or returning to education after their children have grown. The following case presents an illustration of one such student who is typical of the students in this situation. Tim, a business student, worked for a local company in the mailroom for twenty-five years, serving as the mailroom manager for the last ten years. He was displaced when the company downsized, and he was left without skills and the education needed for employment. He found the mailroom job after high school and now at age 44, he could not afford to raise his family on the low-paying jobs he could find. Tim was receiving government funding; his employment counselor advised him to take the business program at the NSCC where he could complete the program in one year and gain re-entry to the workplace. Tim's background was weak and the program was a significant struggle for him. However, he was typical of most mature students who possess a strong motivation and a strong work ethic. He completed the program and found employment earning a salary that would allow him to support his family.

Given this background, Grubb's contention about the importance of community colleges certainly appears plausible. However, he goes beyond this contention to introduce a theoretical concept, that of students as 'experimenters' which seeks to explain their behaviour at college in individualistic rather than class terms. That is, the behaviour is seen in terms of individual psychology rather than being structured by social class. Once seen in individual terms the high levels of attrition can be explained in terms of individuals as 'experimenters'.

'Experimenting' with a Community College Business Education

The research by Grubb (1999) presented below shows that many community college students are undecided "experimenters" using the community college as an opportunity to explore educational career possibilities.

Some students in community colleges are there for specific purposes, but others aren't sure what they want to do-they

minimal work, 'They have little tolerance for messy thinking or expansion of frames of reference beyond the routine and predictable' (Sacks, 1996, p.128).

are using the community college to find out. These “undecided” students, or “experimenters” (Manski, 1989), leave high school without knowing what they want to do, or find themselves in dead-end jobs without a clue about what directions might be more productive” (Grubb, 1999, p. 4).

Grubb’s findings (1999) were echoed in the research on attrition completed by Tinto (1987, 1993) in which he identified many college students who were unsure of their reasons for enrolling at an institution, as illustrated by the following quote:

But not all students enter colleges with clearly held educational and/or occupational intentions. Nor are those intentions unchanged during the course of a college career. A good many, if not a majority of, entering students are uncertain of their long-term educational or occupational goals (Tinto, 1987, p. 42).

However, while it might be the case that students at community colleges do experiment (See Chapter 6), the concept of experimentation needs to be critically interrogated. The question needs to be asked as to whether experimentation in this sense is class based. For example, following Bourdieu, it could be argued that middle class students know that university has to be an automatic choice if they are to gain professional or managerial levels jobs. In North America, where undergraduate degrees are modularized and choices in relation to occupation are often made by the type of graduate school chosen, there is a degree of experimentation that students can undertake, especially at the undergraduate level. However, to apply this model of experimentation to the community college level, as Grubb does, may be mistaken. Students from professional and managerial backgrounds know the rules of the game in the way described by Bourdieu⁸, understanding the links between an academic degree and the occupations to which it leads. As he (1997) observes:

⁸ Bourdieu believes that working class parents select a school for their children based on practical constraints, rather than future goals. It may be argued that the same principle is at work when students choose a one year NCSS business certificate programme.

With academic qualifications, a certificate of cultural competence, which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture, social alchemy, produces a form of cultural capital which has a relative autonomy vis-à-vis its bearer and even vis-à-vis the cultural capital he effectively possesses at a given moment in time (p.51).

But arguably, many working class community college students will not understand the linkages between an academic education and the labour market because, as Rhoads and Valdez (1996) suggest working class students do not have this type of cultural capital, rather they have 'border knowledge'. Moreover, if they are constrained in the way described by Brint and Karabel (1989) by contexts of locality, family and money then their choices may be limited to what they see as of immediate relevance.

It should be noted, also, that there is a tension between the idea of choosing courses for immediate relevance, as hypothesized by Brint and Karabel and Grubb's concept of 'experimentation.' Why would students seeking to regain employment or to make a small step up on current salary 'experiment'? The tension though may be more apparent than real if it is remembered that community colleges cater to younger and mature students with family ties and responsibilities. In this case Grubb's theory may apply to the younger group more than the older.

For the younger group, however, experimentation may also be a function of them not understanding even the vocational links between college's programs and the labour market. Many "experimenters," having attended low-quality high schools, have no sense of their abilities or what postsecondary education entails...But most instructors accept that helping such "lost souls" find their way into the world is an important (if underrated) function of the community college – "a wonderful, cheap opportunity to do it" (Grubb, 1999, p 5). If these 'lost souls' come from

homes where parents have not been well educated and may be unemployed and if their high school experience was a poor one, why would they understand these connections?

Finally, the way in which labour market signals are read by students from different classes may have an impact on their understanding of the role of education in relation to the labour market. In a service dominated economy the links between educational credentials and the labour market may be blurred. Equally, employers may expect the qualities instilled in university students to be different from those stressed at community colleges, although these differences may not appear obvious to working class students. Specific technical employment skills, rather than technical problem solving abilities and qualities of discipline and punctuality, for example, may be emphasized in community college in preparation for entry level employment; university graduates may be expected to possess higher level skills that include critical thinking and analytical abilities for the high skills market.

A Dialogue with the Advocates and Critics

Unlike the traditional literature review, as evidenced already in this chapter, the format and unorthodox approach of this thesis is to carry on a dialogue with the authors throughout the paper, which results in frequent quoting and testing of key authors; namely, Grubb, Karabel, Rhoads, Shaw, and Valadez. The research of Karabel was presented in the first part of the chapter, however, the following summary of his 1989 research on community colleges and social stratification will provide the balance necessary to provide context for the work of Shaw, Rhoads and Valadez, Grubb, and others.

In summary, Karabel's (1989) research uses national data on education, earnings and demographics to report that community colleges are not egalitarian institutions as they serve to track low-income students into low earning positions.

The community college is shown to be at the bottom of the track of post secondary institutions in social class origins and occupations for graduates. The foundation of Karabel's research is the data reported by Burton Clark (1960) that CCs "cool out" the ambitions of their students as they are sorted and tracked into programs that lead to occupations with poor economic returns to the student. Further evidence of the "cooling out" function is the high rate of attrition and low rate of transfer to university.

To present Karabel's research appropriately, it is important to acknowledge that while he reports that CCs fail to raise income levels for starting positions, there is the visage of upward mobility as graduates move from blue collar to white collar positions, despite the fact that they are at the low-end of the occupation in earnings.

The research of Shaw, Rhoads and Valdez (1999) is a direct challenge to the research of Karabel; they present qualitative data to uncover how CCs transform students into active, informed participants in higher education. They, furthermore, contend that the problem with previous research, i.e. Karabel, is that it has been at the macro level and quantitative. Shaw, et al (1999), believe that critical qualitative research based on site-specific qualitative analysis is needed to understand the diverse population described by Dougherty (1994) as primarily low-income, minority, with 37 percent over the age of 30. According to Shaw, et al (1999), case studies that provide a rich, descriptive analysis are required to understand how these CC students are different from the students found in four-year institutions. One result was the reporting of similar research findings to that of Clark (1960) and Karabel (1989); namely, that CC students experience high rates of drop-out and low rates of transfer to four-year universities.

Shaw, et al (1999), challenge that CCs can adopt cultures and pedagogies that empower students through recognition of their possession of different forms of

capital. A flexible pedagogy can be designed to empower students. Through development of social bonds students are engaged and develop self-esteem and “emotional capital,” which, according to the researchers, is an underpinning of upward mobility. The goal of empowerment is found in a curriculum that goes beyond socializing students and providing them with skills that pave the way for employment in low-level positions. The emphasis would be on creating the critical thought processes and higher level skills that form the basis for the extension of student career aspirations.

Shaw, et al (1999) in their effort to research whether CCs provide access to groups previously excluded or whether the institutions reinforce social inequality by tracking students present the writing of McGrath and Buskirk (1999), which follows:

McGrath and Buskirk (1999) concur with Shaw, et al (1999) that CCs must be read as texts to understand their practices and discourses. The emphasis is on how to create the social and emotional capital that engages students who will not take the initiative themselves to connect with the institution. The culture of a CC is viewed as vital to engaging students in a way that leads to success. McGrath and Buskirk (1999) use a case study method that involves focus groups and individual interviews to present an analysis of the role of social and emotional capital in a successful CC educational experience.

The contention is that students require “an image of the future” to place their daily struggles in perspective. This vision of the future is necessary to overcome self-doubt and uncertainty for students. A goal, according to McGrath and Buskirk (1999) is to help students see that they need an education that goes beyond basic skills training, with emphasis on discussion, reading and participation that is student-centered and empowering. Student success stories are considered to be powerful sources of transformation. Specific vehicles used to create emotional

capital come through mentoring, tutoring, coaching, and support groups. Informal coaching through student interaction with advanced and/or former students would help to promote self-efficacy – a trust in a student’s ability to achieve success. According to McGrath and Buskirk (1999) the key to retaining at-risk students is the development of emotional capital that encourages them to reframe themselves by envisioning a career that is beyond low-level employment.

The Economic Returns to a Community College Education

Norton Grubb’s 1992 research on the earnings of community college students provides a suitable conclusion to the research of the advocates and critics of CCs by presenting an analysis of the quantitative economic returns that accrue to various forms of sub-baccalaureate education. Grubb points out that while extensive analysis of the economic returns of a four-year university degree exists, there is little research below the baccalaureate level. The research data Grubb used was collected on students 14 years after completion of high school to allow time for the experimentation phase as the students settle into “adult” employment. The basis for this decision was the belief that earning differences may not have had time to develop when individuals are compared directly out of high school, community college, and university.

Through his research using the National Longitudinal Study of the class of 1972 (NLS72), Grubb substantiated the finding that there is a significant difference in earning for those with baccalaureate degrees over high school completion. Completion of a community college one-year certificate, however, did not result in significant earning increases over those with only high school completion. The most significant finding was that students with a two-year CC diploma had an advantage in wages and earnings over HS completers. This advantage is strongly qualified by the explanation that the advantage in earning is attributed more directly to the student’s work experience, industry contact and on-the-job training (OJT), as stated below:

Another way to state this conclusion is that vocational associate degrees appear to help men find “careers” (rather than “jobs”) where they can gain considerable experience and progress steadily up occupational ladders associated with experience; for the group without baccalaureate degrees, what seems to matter the most is gaining access to such careers, rather than the influence of formal credentials once an individual has found such a career (Grubb, 1992, p. 232).

Grubb also reports that the conventional belief among community colleges that students return to complete courses to upgrade skills and fill gaps in education to increase earnings is a misrepresentation. These students who may appear to be noncompleters or dropouts who have met the personal goals that they set for themselves find that there is little or no economic return based on Grubb’s research findings. The data reveals that students who take short programs of study and/or leave without credentials do not increase their earnings:

Once again, the results indicate that students need to complete coherent programs of study, rather than coursework that does not culminate in credentials, in order to benefit from community colleges, technical institutes and proprietary schools (Grubb, 1992, p. 239).

The conclusion drawn from Grubb’s research is that CC students who do not complete specific programs of study leading to a two-year diploma do not benefit in higher earnings over students with only a high school diploma. There is an increase in earning that accrues to those who complete a two-year CC diploma, with the most significant contribution to the increase earning attributed to work experience and OJT.

Research Questions: Testing Two Competing Hypothesis

In summary, this chapter has identified two competing views of community college education. The first position, best represented by the research of Grubb (1999) is that community colleges are a key element in a democratic and

egalitarian educational strategy, which provides the opportunity for students to have a second chance at entry to university and which explains high levels of attrition in terms of the concept of 'experimentation'. The second, contrary position, represented by the research of Brint and Karabel (1989) and Clark (1960) is the contention that community colleges prepare working class students for low paying working class jobs.

The underpinning research questions raised by these competing schools of thought are best presented in two categories, as follows: The first set of research questions and related hypotheses represent the advocate position for community colleges as open-access, egalitarian institutions serving to provide opportunity for working class and other students. The second set of research questions will present the hypotheses that community colleges provide limited upward mobility, access to low-end jobs, and high drop out rates as a means of keeping working class students from progressing beyond their social class.

The first step is to present the two competing research questions and hypotheses. The second step will be to present the strategies adopted to test the two competing hypotheses, while recognizing the complexity of the issues raised. The overarching concern generated by the hypotheses will be an understanding through research of whether community colleges prepare students for working class jobs or whether they provide opportunity for upward mobility.

Testing the Hypotheses of the Advocates of Community College Education

An examination of the research of the advocates, represented by Grubb (1999) ⁹ leads to the development of the following theses:

1. Students are drawn from diverse social groupings and not solely from the working class.

⁹ See also Shaw (1999)

2. Community colleges offer working class students opportunities for upward mobility through the recognition of course credits for partial completion of a university degree.
3. Community colleges provide students with an education that prepares them for careers beyond low-end positions. This involves the types of pedagogy employed, the nature of the curriculum and various forms of support, which all consistently provide students with a genuine second chance.
4. Attrition is primarily a result of individual students' experimentation.

There is the question to be tested of whether "experimenters" are more likely to be drawn from lower social classes, or whether they are drawn from a wider variety of classes and are more heterogeneous. If it is discovered that they are more heterogeneous, experimentation may be more a matter of a genuine uncertainty among students about how to plan their futures. Alternatively, as suggested above, it is possible that students do not understand the connections of post secondary education to further study and the labour market; accordingly, they experiment blindly when registering for community college programs.

The problem of attrition raises the question of the degree to which community colleges can 'compensate' for society, if it turns out to be class based. Karabel (1977) contends that community colleges blame students for their failure and subsequent dropout, perhaps as a result of 'experimentation' in the form of unidentified goals, to justify its existence. As he sees it:

Community colleges exist in part to reconcile students' culturally induced hopes for mobility with their eventual destinations, transforming structurally induced failure into individual failure (Karabel, 1977, p 249).

However, in the more optimistic vein of Rhoads and Valdez (1996) it is important to ask about the nature of knowledge and types of pedagogy and student support that colleges provide in order to maximise the life chances of working class students. Karabel's views would have far greater substance if the curriculum, pedagogy and support systems all reinforced working class 'failure'.

Testing the Hypotheses of the Critics of Community College Education

The second set of hypotheses, which are mirror images of the first set, that community colleges are not egalitarian democratic institutions and that they do not provide opportunity for lower social classes is best explored through the writing of Brint and Karabel (1989) and Clark (1960). The hypotheses that emerge for this research enquiry are as follows:

1. The majority of students enrolling in community colleges are from working class families.
2. There is little upward mobility from community colleges to universities; in other words, students are trapped at a certain level of credential and restricted in their careers to lower levels of employment.
3. Community college graduates are restricted to entry into low paying, largely dead-end jobs that offer limited opportunity for development and salary increases. Pedagogy, the curriculum and support services serve, unintentionally, to reinforce short term vocational goals for working class jobs.
4. The high attrition rate is an institutional and systemic failure that serves to "cool out" students' ambitions.

For further clarification, the high attrition rate will be examined under the premise that it is attributed to five possible explanations, as follows: first, students are unclear as to the rules of the post secondary educational system and how it translates into career opportunities. Second, they already perceive that a

community college education will not provide them with an enhanced education and employment opportunities and therefore use it as a 'parking lot' until a job opportunity arrives. Third, poorer students cannot afford the explicit and implicit costs of study and are more likely to drop out. Fourth, the low fees make community college the first choice of institutions for students "experimenting" with a post secondary education. Finally, students are happy to drop out because they were genuinely experimenting and found that post secondary education was not for them. In this case experimenters would come from a diverse range of social backgrounds.

The next chapter will present the research process followed to collect the data required to weigh the evidence and make reasoned judgments as to which hypotheses best reflect reality. The two chapters that follow will present separate analyses of the survey and focus group data. The attrition rate of 44 percent for the NSCC and the significance of this issue warrant a separate chapter, Chapter Seven, devoted specifically to attrition.

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

Research Objectives and Questions

This research was guided by the hypotheses presented in Chapter Three. The overall process was: (i) to gather survey data through a questionnaire discussed here with the results presented in Chapter Five; (ii) to generate qualitative data through a series of focus groups. The data is presented in Chapter Six; (iii) to generate a detailed study of attrition, which is presented in Chapter Seven.

The strategy is to test the various hypotheses by using multiple instruments and quantitative and qualitative methods. The matching of hypotheses to methods is as follows, if we assume that the two sets of hypotheses are mirror images of each other:

1. Whether students are drawn from diverse social groupings and not solely from the working class will be tested by survey data.
2. Whether community colleges offer working class students opportunities for upward mobility through the recognition of course credits for partial completion of a university degree will be tested by questionnaire survey data and college statistics.
3. Whether community colleges provide students with an education that prepares them for careers beyond low-end positions. This involves the types of pedagogy employed, the nature of the curriculum and various forms of support, which all consistently provide students with a genuine second chance. This will be tested by official statistics, college statistics and by qualitative data through focus group interviews. These focus group interviews also seek to illuminate students' motivation in coming to college and the reasons for their decision-making.

4. Whether attrition is primarily a result of individual students' experimentation rather than determined by class factors will be tested by another questionnaire.

Comprehensive profiles were developed of the one-year Business Information Technology (BIT) certificate students in the class of 2001, and the two-year Business Administration diploma students in the class of 2002 to answer the following questions: What are the demographics profiles of the business students? Do business students at the NSCC represent the working class student typical of the students found in the research of the critics and advocates of community college education?

Identification of the pre-enrolment decision making process of current business students and information about the pre-enrolment decision making processes of students in second level business diploma programs were used to answer the following question: Why do students enroll in business at the NSCC?

What are the immediate continuing education and subsequent career choices made by graduates of the BIT and Business Administration programs? This data leads to a further research question, as follows: To what extent does a student's career choice reflect the argument that he or she is being prepared for working class jobs?

An analysis of attrition is presented to interpret the NSCC's ability to serve its mandate as an open-access, democratic institution, which leads to the following research question: Why do such a large percentage of students leave before completing their program of study?

Finally, when the results used to test these hypotheses are presented the much broader question: Does a community college education serve to either liberate students from lower social classes, or does it perpetuate the class system, can be addressed.

Research Methodology: diagram of data collection

Preliminary Phase	Phase I	Phase II	Phase III	Phase IV
Focus group conducted to test the focus group process and to pilot the survey.	Focus groups conducted on rural and urban campuses	Surveys administered in person on rural and urban campuses	Member checking meetings held with faculty and students	Identification of high rates of attrition resulting in an additional survey specifically to gather data on attrition

Data Collection

The data collection was carried out in steps, as follows: The first step involved a focus group with a representative sample of the business student population. The purpose of this focus group session was to both identify and pilot the questions that had been developed for both the survey and the focus groups. This preliminary session also provided the opportunity to test the process. One result was the identification of the need for a second facilitator/observer to provide feedback on my role as a facilitator, with particular emphasis being placed on the questioning process. The observer would also be able to provide an independent interpretation and respond to my interpretations. The additional support provided by a co-facilitator in arranging the room and assisting with the audio equipment and other facilitating tasks was identified as a necessity.

The second step was to conduct the focus groups. The process was to first administer a survey, which required approximately 15 minutes to complete and provided useful background demographic data. The survey was followed by a

focus group session of approximately 90 minutes. The third step was the administration of a separate and more detailed survey to a representative cross section of business administration students. The fourth step in the data collection process entailed triangulation of the findings by conducting follow-up focus groups with faculty and students. This triangulation process along with the two separate methods of data collection, survey and focus groups, created greater reliability and validity by using multiple methods of data collection. The details of the data collection are outlined below as a four-phase process.

Phase One

Four focus groups with five to seven participants were held with 25 BIT students. Four focus groups with five to eight participants were conducted with 38 BIT students in second level programs. Two focus groups were held at each of two urban campuses (Akerley and Halifax) and at each of two rural campuses (Lunenburg and Strait). In addition, a focus group was held with eight applicants who had been accepted but chose not to attend the NSCC. These eight participants were paid \$25 each (They were not current students, and it was unlikely that they would travel to the College to participate without payment. All others participants were students. They received lunch or coffee, depending on the time of the focus group.). All groups completed a survey and participated in a two-hour directed discussion, which was audio recorded and later transcribed. The survey and focus group questions are found in the appendices. The actual responses are presented separately, and they are interwoven within the data results and analysis.

Phase Two

A survey instrument was developed and refined based on the responses from the focus groups. The final questionnaire was administered in person (resulting in a 100 percent return rate) to a stratified sample of 228 BIT Students representing the following campuses: Urban - Akerley and Halifax, Rural – Kingstec, Lunenburg, Marconi, Pictou, Strait. The number of surveys was randomly

selected to provide a sample that was in proportion to the distribution of the rural/urban student population, 67 percent rural to 33 percent urban. The age range was 18 to 54 with an average age of 25. The ratio of males to females was 55 percent female to 45 percent male. The average age for the NSCC BIT program is (25.9) with the ratio of females to males 54 percent to 46 percent. The stratified sample was representative of the College BIT population. The final sample size of 228 represents 39 percent of the population of BIT students who complete the program. It represents 21 percent of the total BIT population, including “completers” and “leavers.”

Limitations of the Sample

Ideally it would have been desirable to collect detailed information on parent’s occupation and income for the sample of business students and for a cohort sample of students in programs across the NSCC. This information would have provided greater insight the students’ social class background. Without this more objective measure the study had to rely on the researcher’s contextual understanding of the links between social class and the BIT program at the NSCC, although it will be apparent from the data on parents who had degrees and the focus group research reported that the majority of these students came from working class backgrounds.

It was relatively easy to obtain information from the business students through focus groups and surveys because they knew and trusted me. Meeting with students face-to-face to collect survey data, followed by member checking, resulted in a one-hundred percent response rate and the opportunity to corroborate the findings. The same results would have been difficult to obtain from another sample of students from across NSCC programs, where I did not know the students. The data would have been skewed based on completion rates, depth and breadth of responses.

Collection of detailed income and occupation data on student's parents met with resistance. Students were willing to report their parent's education; however, they showed resistance when asked for parent's income and occupation. As mature students (22-29), they saw this request as a demeaning and a devaluing of their individuality and independence. It was also possible that for financial reasons, possibly funding criteria, they were guarded about disclosing parental information.¹⁰

Phase Three

This phase involved verifying the findings and providing grounding of the data through discussion with faculty and students representing both urban and rural campuses. This process provided greater reliability and validity through triangulation; the use of several research methods and data collection.

Phase Four

The final phase was dedicated to the collection of data on attrition by surveying 123 business administration students (Appendix 12). Data was collected on: parents' income, career and education goals, and placement test scores. The goal was to use 'odds ratios' to determine which students are most at-risk of not persisting to complete their community college education. A large group discussion was held with 95 business administration students to verify the results of the survey through the process of "member checking" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

¹⁰ It is possible that some students did not know their parents income. It is also quite possible that for students from lower socio-economic families, they may have left home in their teens and feel less of a connection to their parents. Students whose parents received social assistance or where parental income was for one reason or another more difficult to ascertain may find it more difficult to disclose this information.

Instruments of Data Collection and Process

Questionnaire

Through careful application of stratified sampling techniques a representative sample of 228 business students was drawn from the population of 990 Business Information Technology students from the class of 2001. The sample size of 23 percent was sufficient to ensure accurate estimates for the overall BIT population.

The ratio of males to females was selected to ensure it matched the BIT class of 2001, 55 percent female to 45 percent male. The urban to rural sample was allocated in a ratio of 67 percent to 33 percent to reflect the rural to urban BIT student population distribution. The questionnaire provided detailed demographic data. It also served to gather research on student motivation for attending the NSCC. The third area of information collected focused on future educational and occupational plans. Chapter Five is devoted exclusively to the presentation and analysis of the survey data.

Focus Groups

The focus group is a collectivistic rather than an individualistic research method that focuses on the multivocality of participants' attitudes, experiences and beliefs (Madriz, 1999 in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 794).

The selection of focus group participants was more complex and less precise than the sampling selection for the questionnaire. The focus groups were selected to represent urban and rural campuses. The objective was to have the students share their experiences to provide grounding for the research and the interpretation of the data. This sharing of experience through focus groups provided an opportunity to observe the interaction and dynamics of the participants, as described by Denzin and Lincoln:

Compared with individual interviews, the clear advantage of focus groups is that they make it possible for researchers to observe the interactive process occurring among participants (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 836).

The final process to increase triangulation (the use of multiple sources of data collection: questionnaire and focus groups) was to share the findings with rural and urban faculty and students. This process known as “member checking” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) allows participants the opportunity to respond to the research findings.

Validating Focus Groups

Moreover, a critical analysis of the community college culture calls for a qualitative approach that brings researchers closer to their subjects, allowing them to explore the complexities and nuances of truth, meaning, and understanding (Shaw, et al, 1999 p. 195).

The opportunity to bring the business students together created a synergy that grew out of the common experiences and backgrounds of the students in the focus groups. This comfortable environment set the stage for sharing of ideas, beliefs, and values. There was a strong sense that the students felt this opportunity to express their ideas and experiences was a validation of their collective experience as a community of students.

Madriz (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) notes the limitations of focus groups, as follows: First, focus groups provide a more limited range of behavioral measures because they take place in artificial situations. Seven of the ten focus groups were held in the boardrooms of the campuses, one in a faculty lunchroom, and two in classrooms. Second, the interaction with the facilitator makes it difficult to determine how authentic the participation is among participants. Students at one of the rural campuses questioned me extensively about my role and purpose. They were initially apprehensive about why a teacher/researcher from the city would want to conduct a discussion group with students from a rural campus. I needed extra time to explain the purpose of my research and to gain their trust. This process made me even more aware of my role as a focus group moderator in an artificial situation. My position of power as a moderator was always a concern for me. My goal was to reduce this bias as much as possible through my own

awareness. I worked with broad questions allowing the students to set the agenda as much as possible. Given the obvious limitations of focus groups, Madriz (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) states that the advantage is the opportunity for interaction that occurs in a discussion group.

Another argument made by Madriz is that the focus group may serve to give a voice to those who would not necessarily be heard through other research gathering processes (p. 837). The balance of power can shift from the interviewer to the focus group; therefore, throughout the interview process I was always aware that I was a faculty member capable of moving the discussion in a direction of my choice. As much as possible I tried to rely on my professional experience as a corporate facilitator. The goal was not to teach or direct, but to uncover and allow the participants to take and direct the discussion. Madriz (2000) in the following quote describes how the focus group with a collective voice switches the balance of power away from the interviewer to the group:

It is believed that the group situation may reduce the influence of the interviewer on the research subjects by tilting the balance of power toward the group. Because focus groups emphasize the collective, rather than the individual, they foster free expression of ideas, encouraging the members of the group to speak up (Madriz quoting Denzin, 1986; Frey and Fontanna, 1993; in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 838).

The interaction and dynamics within the focus groups were observed and noted, along with my influence as a moderator. This interaction and potential bias was mediated as much as possible by having an observer in the focus group sessions. Faculty members volunteered to sit in on the focus group sessions and serve as observers. After each session I held a debriefing with the observer to determine their interpretation of the interaction, dynamics, and my role as a moderator. Prior to the session, I asked the observers to focus on my moderating skills, noting any times that I might have failed in my goal of being non-directive and unbiased. Oppenheim (2000) believes that the role of the interviewer can impact the successful participation of the group, as follows:

The leader's approach will, in principle, be made the same as an individual depth interview: there is likely to be a hidden agenda, as the leader will try to be as non-directive as possible, while maintaining control of the group. However, there is the further intention that a lively discussion should develop among the respondents who, it is hoped, will spark off new ideas in each other. This could become a source of bias; for example, if one person tries to dominate the discussion or if the group splits into separate camps (Oppenheim, 2000, p.547).

The results of the observations were positive, with only a few occasions of directing being noted. I also had the advantage of audiotapes and transcripts that I used to assess my role as a moderator. Videotape was not used because I wanted to ensure anonymity, and I felt that it would be too intrusive, possibly inhibiting discussion. I wanted to set the stage for a more natural and open discussion, as opposed to a power struggle between me, as the moderator, and the group in the way described by Denzin and Lincoln (2000):

Unlike more traditional research techniques, such as face-to-face interviews, in group interviews researchers observe participants engaging in dialogue, sharing ideas, opinions, and experiences, and even debating with each other (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 840).

Denzin's label for this process provides a clear indication of the intent of the research, "interpretative interactionism" (p 840). Madriz further notes that the multivocality of the group validates the students' experiences with other students of similar backgrounds. The sharing of perspectives from the students in the focus groups validated and legitimized their experiences as Denzin and Lincoln describe:

Focus groups have become an important technique because they offer a way for researchers to listen to the plural voices of others. They are especially important for making audible the voices of oppressed people who are demanding to be heard (p. 848).

Many of these students would represent marginalized populations that would not have had this opportunity to express their views before. The majority of the students in the focus groups were women; many were of lower socioeconomic

status. The questioning process involved the opportunity to write and a process of moving around the table to allow any reticent participants the chance to be heard. At the start of the focus group process I stressed that there were no “right” or “wrong” answers in order to follow the best research practice of Denzin and Lincoln (2000) in empowering focus group members to participate.

The collective experience of the focus group empowers participants to take control of the discussion process, moving the conversation toward areas of the topic relevant to them, sometimes encouraging and even compelling the researcher to reconsider her views on a certain subject (p. 847).

The true test of whether the students’ voices in the focus groups have been heard will be the impact that my research has on the development of policy. One specific area will be how policy reflects student concerns about their access to second level programs. The focus groups and the questionnaires, supported by research on the College, indicated that students are not able and/or willing to travel to take a second level business program at another campus. This lack of mobility because of the costs associated with location could be addressed in future College policy. Chambers (2000) would view this change in policy as a result of the research, as follows:

Applied work helps people make decisions and is generally directed toward informing others of the possible consequences of policy options or programs or directed change...The most immediate measure of the significance of applied research is its contribution to decision making (Chambers, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 801).

The interests of students and the College are being investigated. The student culture will be a part of the research; however, the focus is not to achieve a deep understanding of the culture; therefore, this prevents my research from being defined as applied ethnography. The shared meaning that comes from the focus groups will be used to inform decisions, which contributes to the applied nature of this research enquiry.

Personal Perspective and Research

My combined role as a researcher, teacher, and facilitator of the focus group sessions are inextricably linked. While steps were taken to reduce my personal biases, such as the addition of a co-facilitator/observer, it was inevitable that my personal frame of reference would play a role in the research findings. I am, after all, writing about my college, my colleagues, and me as a teacher. I believe that it is important to present a framework for my voice, so that my values, beliefs, and assumptions may be made transparent.

Through the story and its plot, we make sense of our ongoing experiences. They serve as the basis for action, in the classroom, and elsewhere. Thus to understand educational events, one must confront biography (Kridel, 1998, p.24).

My perspective is in two parts, personal and career, even though they are so closely intertwined that it is hard to say where one begins and the other ends. Both also are inextricably connected to the history and the restructuring of the College in response to the changing political economy. "Yet the public and the private cannot so easily be separated in teaching" (Bullough, 1995, in Kridel, 1998, p.24).

From a personal perspective, education has always been an extremely large part of my life. My parent's lack of education and their manual jobs as dishwashers and cleaners, interspersed with periods of unemployment, should have statistically predicted that I would have limited opportunities in education and employment. This demographic predestiny of lower socioeconomic populations became a reality for my older siblings.

One of the clear findings in the sociology of education over the past 20 years has been to establish a link between income and educational performance (Brown, et al., 1997, p 12).

My oldest sister left elementary school to take a job in a fish plant. My older brother left high school to take a job as a shipping clerk. My next eldest sister dropped out of junior high and later returned to complete a commercial course

and take a job as a porter. I was fortunate to break the chains of socio-economic status and earn four university degrees; being the first family member to graduate from high school was a major accomplishment in itself. The importance of education in changing my life circumstances makes me a crusader for those less advantaged because of social and economic conditions. It is probably not surprising that I am not an advocate of allowing the rationality of the competitive marketplace to self-regulate access to higher education. The consequence of free market, laissez-faire regulation, is lack of social justice, described by Lauder in the following quote:

The only way forward is to invest in education and training to enable workers to become fully employable. In this account, social justice inheres in providing all individuals with the opportunity to gain access to an education that qualifies them for a job (Lauder, 1996).

Conversely, I am not convinced that government regulation is the answer. For example, in Nova Scotia disadvantaged students are given grants to attend post-secondary programs, with the stipulation that the program should not exceed two years and the graduate employment record for the program is high. These programs are seen as “quick fixes” because they provide core occupational competencies in the minimum amount of time – usually nine months. The result is that students are pushed toward low-end niche market jobs in areas such as call centers where turnover is high. All students, regardless of socioeconomic background should have the opportunity to enroll in a program of study of their choice. Their economic status should not be a barrier to taking programs that are longer in duration or programs where employer demand is currently not strong. The argument from social assistance agencies that provide funding for students in need is that they must ensure a good return on their investment in the student’s education. The economic return on the investment is measured by employment of the student.

The individual is held responsible for success, alleviating the responsibility of the State and private interests for altering the distribution of income or resources (Kemper, 1998).

It would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study to determine employer retention and success rates for students who have chosen, or are advised, to take programs of study that lead to employment in areas that the students would not have chosen had their economic circumstances been different. Does a lack of general education stand as a barrier to career change and advancement? Labarac (1999) believes that it does:

The value of education and training is confirmed by studies that point to the high returns on investments in this field. However, such studies often overlook two points. Firstly, the 'distribution' factor affects the benefits of education, so that the more egalitarian the access to general education of equal quality, the greater the returns on investment in education and training (Labarca, 1998 p.415).

The above quote reflects my personal perspective that is closely connected to my teaching career, which I would like to present as the other component of the framework for my voice.

My 20-year teaching career began in 1981 when I started teaching at the Halifax Regional Vocational School. My qualifications included a business degree in economics and four years of experience in bank management, which was the minimum requirement for employment. My goal as expressed through the government and school policy of the day was to prepare students for the local workforce. I was strongly committed to that goal, and I remember arguing that the course contained too much unnecessary detail and should focus more on specific employment skills, such as word processing, letter writing, and accounting. Now, some 20 years later, I find myself arguing for the College to be less employment focused and more devoted to delivery of a broader education, as described below in Haddard's words:

New forms of work organization go beyond the Fordist production model in which a worker was trained for a specific and limited task. The manufacturing plant of today requires a worker who can respond to a flexible production process. This calls for both a basic training and a capacity for abstraction and adaptation of working methods.

Consequently, general education has acquired a new value, and the gap between general and vocational education has narrowed (Haddard, 1996, p.9).

I reflect more on my own business education and the value that I received from elective courses in literature and philosophy, and I see less value in the skills course of the day¹¹. I will contend in this research on the NSCC that reliance on current employer demands will lead to a less well-educated student. An additional contention is that personal and social values can, and should be, included in the curriculum along with employment goals. The premise underpinning my research will be that education cannot simply be viewed as a commodity.¹² “Everything and everyone in every arena; can be thought of, and increasingly is, as a commodity for sale in the marketplace” (Shumar, 1998). Green (1998) carries this argument into practice when he acknowledges that a curriculum designed to provide employment competencies would not provide a common foundation for learning.

Only some notion of general culture, addressing the future needs of adults as both workers and citizens, can fulfill this function. Historically in France, it has been just this notion of *culture generale*, as a minimum entitlement of all French citizens, which has provided the cement that has held the academic and general education at least within talking distance of each other if not exactly in unison. Without some mandatory core of general education, which is how this concept translates in educational practice, any plans for a unified curriculum will, in practice, turn out to be little more than technical fixes. They may allow ‘mixing and matching’ but they will provide no real commonality – and no notion of a shared culture or common citizenship either (Green, 1998, p. 38).

¹¹ Brown (2001) contends that that employers will chose to exploit employee skills to earn profit, rather than invest in upgrading the skills of workers to take advantage of the knowledge-driven economy

¹² Shumar (1997) in his book, *College for Sale: A Critique of the Commodification of Higher Education*, argues that economic logic or rationality only has meaning in economic terms when it is drawn into a market system of commodity production, where learning is the product; students are consumers; educators are delivers; employers are the product designers.

The next two chapters will present the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the survey and focus groups. The analysis of the data will set the stage for the results to be presented and for the hypotheses to be tested.

Chapter Five

Survey Results and Analysis

Survey Results and Analysis

Each of the tables represents the percent of responses from the sample of 228 BIT students. The “Total” is the response for the entire sample; the rural represents 76 students (33 percent of the sample); the urban represents 152 students (67 percent of the sample). Rural and urban were chosen as the independent variables; however, other demographic variables that include age, previous education, and gender are examined.

Table 1. Background Information

The questions asked in Table 1 were designed to gather demographic data on students and their parents. What level of education did students have prior to admission to the NSCC? What was their parents’ level of education? These questions provide the opportunity to determine family educational background, which leads to a picture of the socioeconomic class of the student. The answers to the questions in this table bring us one step closer to determining whether the business students of the NSCC are the working class students identified in the research of Clark (1960), Brint and Karabel (1989), or whether they are more heterogeneous, as suggested by Grubb (1999) and Shaw, (1999).

Question	Percent responding “Yes”		
	rural	urban	total
Have you attended the NSCC before?	25%	18%	22%
Have you attended university at any time?	20%	32%	25%
Were you attending high school last year?	27%	19%	23%
Were you working last year?	63%	74%	68%
Have you attended a private college at any time?	2.4%	16.6%	7.5%

Has anyone in your family attended NSCC?	52%	43%	48%
Has anyone in your family attended university?	62%	67%	64%
Has anyone in your family attended a private college?	13.5%	24.5%	18%

Results and Analysis:

Private Colleges:

Very few students, 2.4 percent rural and 16.6 percent urban have attended a private college. The higher number for the urban campuses would likely reflect accessibility. Focus group data presented in section two of the report showed that less than 5 percent of students considered private colleges as an alternative to NSCC programming. The reasons cited were higher fees, inconvenient location, and reputation. *"I didn't want to go to school in a mall"* (BIT student).

Activity Prior to Attending:

Rural campuses had a higher percent of students directly out of high school, 27 percent compared to 19 percent for the urban campuses. 74 percent of urban students were working and 63 percent of rural students were working prior to attending. 32 percent of urban students had attended university compared to 20 percent of rural students.

The above results probably reflect the greater access to universities and jobs in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). It does not, however, account for cultural differences between urban and rural campuses with regard to work and education.

Family Education:

It was most likely that a family member would have attended university for both urban and rural campuses: rural 62 percent and urban 67 percent. At the rural campuses 52 percent of students had a family member who had attended the

NSCC, while the number was 43 percent for urban students. Private colleges represented 13.5 percent and 24.5 percent for rural and urban campuses, respectively. The rural student and his or her family members were more likely to have attended the NSCC.

At first sight, it may seem that such a large proportion of students, 64 percent rural and 67 percent urban, reported that at least one member of their family had attended university. There are several factors that may impact these numbers. The most significant factor is that prior to the founding of the NSCC in 1988 there was no other choice for post secondary education in Nova Scotia other than university. It is important to note that Nova Scotia has one of the highest ratios of universities per capita in all of North America (Halifax with a population of approximately 250,000 has seven universities within close proximity). Another possible factor contributing to a high rate of participation in university education is that fees have been relatively inexpensive, and it is possible to gain admission with high school or equivalency. It is also a limit of this research question that the emphasis was on whether a family member participated in a university education and not whether they had graduated. It is possible that a family member may have attended for one course or graduated with a four-year degree. The narrow focus of the survey question that asked about parental education did not take into account the education of siblings or other family members. The demographic research collected for this thesis through the surveys showed that only 12 percent of students' parents held a university degree.

Table 2: Decision Making

The questions in Table 2 were intended to determine a student's motivation for attending NSCC. What percent of students plan to transfer to university? What percent are searching for a direct route to employment? The students were asked to reflect on a time prior to making a decision to attend NSCC and respond to the

questions. A limitation of the research is that the students were not asked directly to rank their responses in order of priority.

Table 2. Thinking back to when you were making your decision to enroll in the BIT program, consider how important the following were to you. A “1” represents unimportant and a “5” represents “very important.”

Question	1	2	3	4	5
Program could be completed in one year	13%	10%	20%	22%	35%
Credits could be transferred to university	20%	18%	22%	17%	21%
Prepared you for a second level program	5%	5%	22%	32%	36%
Included a work placement term	8%	16%	17%	30%	29%
Program was located close to home	8%	7%	16%	26%	43%
Fees were affordable	1%	7%	18%	21%	53%
Preparation for employment	0%	4%	11%	33%	52%

Results and Analysis:

Ranking questions where students choose a “4” or “5” to indicate the degree of importance of the variable in their decision to enroll in BIT, the following ranking results:

1. Preparation for employment is the most important reason for selection at 85 percent: 33 percent and 52 percent selecting 4 and 5, respectively.
2. Affordable fees is the second most important reason at 74 percent: 21 percent and 53 percent selecting 4 and 5, respectively.
3. Location of the program close to home was third at 69 percent: 26 percent and 43 percent selecting 4 and 5, respectively.
4. Preparation for a second level program was fourth at 68 percent: 32 percent and 36 percent selecting 4 and 5, respectively.

5. The inclusion of a work placement ranked fifth at 59 percent: 30 percent and 29 percent selecting 4 and 5, respectively.
6. The ability to complete the program in one year at 57 percent; 22 percent and 35 percent selecting 4 and 5, respectively.
7. The ability to transfer credits to university at 38 percent; 17 percent and 21 percent selecting 4 and 5, respectively.

A limitation of this research is that students were not asked to rank their responses in order of importance; therefore, the above ranking is based upon a reasonable inference.

Employment Skills, Fees, Location

Most students, 85 percent, selected the NSCC programs because it prepared them for employment, with 52 percent picking it as the most important reason for enrolling at the NSCC, it was not surprising, given that the programs are focused on providing job skills.. The importance of fees may explain why students do not consider private colleges. Low fees were selected by 53 percent as the most important factor in their decision to enroll at the NSCC, making it the number one reason. Location of a program and preparation for second level programs are worth considering together. If 68 percent of BIT students indicate that they are interested in preparation for a second level program, why is it that only 47 percent register for a second-year program? It most likely reflects the high attrition rate. And it is an indication that more students would like to continue their studies but are unable to complete the first year BIT requirement.

It is important to consider that location of programming is equally as important. This factor combined with the importance of affordable fees will likely have an impact on a student's willingness to relocate to another campus to continue advanced studies. This became an area of discussion for the focus groups. "*Most*

of us have families and can't move. I graduated from OIT and OAIM, and I'm taking CSMS. I couldn't move to take the program that I want" (rural student).

Work Experience Component

The inclusion of a work term in a program is important to very important to 59 percent of students when making a decision to register. The ability to complete the program in one year ranked "as important" to "very important" for 57 percent of the students.

In marketing terms, if applicable to the analysis of an educational market, we can see the student's purchasing decision includes price (affordable fees), place (location of program), product (length of time, work term, preparation for employment - curriculum). The degree of importance of each of these items is 74 percent, 69 percent, and 59 percent respectively. Knowing these key factors in the student's decision making process would allow the College to become more specific in identifying the positioning strategy for business programming.

Student Geographic Mobility

74 students (8 percent) of the 913 students enrolled in BIT for September, 2000 were from a county outside of where the campus was located. 52 BIT graduates who enrolled in a second level business program were from a county outside of where the campus they planned to attend was located. Using the base of 482 "completers" that represents 11 percent of BITs who had relocated or were commuting to the campus for a second level program. The number would require considerable adjustment downward if we consider that campuses such as Kingstec, Strait, and Truro normally serve a number of counties that closely border each other; therefore, commuting is a usual and a necessary activity.

The mobility rate of students attending a campus but indicating they were from a county outside of where the campus is located increases from 8 percent for BIT students to 11 percent for second year students. The conclusion is that neither BIT nor second year students are willing to move or commute to take business programs with the College. The issue of mobility was addressed in focus group sessions. Most students indicate that they would not be willing to relocate or travel to take a second level business program. In fact, I spoke to a number of students who had taken additional programs that were not their first choice at the campus where they completed BIT rather than travel to another campus. Mature students with families are unlikely to be able to relocate or commute significant distances

Further research would be needed to understand the reasons for this decision. How many had relocated? The numbers that were commuting would be worth identifying separately. Only four of the students that I interviewed, from the focus group sample of seventy-one, indicated that they would relocate to take a second level business option at another campus.

This is a directional indicator for policy showing that programming that relies on students taking a first level at one campus and moving to take a second level at another campus is not sound. The new Business Administration program is based on this structure. A student enrolls at any of the twelve campuses offering Business Administration and upon graduation moves to the campus where his or her specialty is located. My research indicates that this will not take place in numbers sufficient to support the second year programs. Would students relocate to attend a regional “hub” campus that had a residence and large campus facilities? More research is required to understand student motivations when it comes to geographic mobility.

The rural campuses were most likely to have students who had completed one or two first level programs, Business Information Technology (BIT) and Office Information Technology (OIT). The rural campuses were also most likely to have students who completed both second level options offered at their campus, for example, Office Administration and Information Management (OAIM) and Computer Systems Management and Support (CSMS), or OAIM and E-Commerce. Students indicated that they would stay and complete a third program at their campus if it were offered. There is a need for more research to understand the reasons for this behaviour. If second level programs were concentrated at regional hubs would students be willing to travel or relocate? Would the availability of residences make a difference to the student's decision to relocate? The level of funding available to students impacts these factors. Given that the College's strategic plan for five to ten years includes a large "hub" campus or several large "hub" campuses, the mobility of the college student population should be understood. The demographic and psychographic profile of a community college student cannot be assumed to be the same as a four-year university student. We certainly know that the socio-economic profile is different. *"I didn't think I had any other options, so I came to the College. I came from a really low-income family, and I had a full student loan. So, I enrolled and said, "What have I done?""* (urban student).

The location of the campus and the second level program is very important. Very few indicated that they would move or travel to another campus to take a second level program.

"I just wouldn't go very far. If I can't drive home in an hour for an emergency for my children, then I won't go" (rural student).

Table 3: Private Colleges

The questions regarding the degree to which a private college was considered were asked because private colleges provide the most direct route to employment.

The private colleges are also considered to be the most direct competition for the NSCC because they compete to attract the same students.

Table 3. How seriously did you consider a program with a private college?

Not at all	62%	
Some consideration	12%	
Strong consideration	10%	
Requested information	9%	
Applied for a program	7%	

Results and Analysis:

Only 7 percent of the students applied to a private college. A further 9 percent requested information. It is difficult to reach overly reliable and valid conclusions based on this data because the students in the NSCC business programs have already indicated their preference for the College over a private college. It could be that private colleges have a high rate of conversion on applications (A high number of those who apply continue on to register for programs.), meaning that they would not be part of this study. It is worth noting that 62 percent gave no consideration to private colleges. The students who participated in the focus group sessions indicated that they did not consider private colleges. Many students were not aware of the private colleges in their area. *"I think there is a Compu College in Antigonish"* (BIT student). *"People think that they're going to get a wicked course because of the high prices, but it's expensive and self-directed"* (rural student).

Table 4: Plans for Next September

This question was asked to assess student motivation after completing the first year of study at the NSCC. The specific goal was to determine what percent of students enrolled hoping to exit after one year to find employment; complete one

year and transfer to university; enroll in a second level specialty program at the NSCC.

Table 4. What do you plan to do next September?

“Yes”

Work full-time	27%
University	9%
NSCC program	68%
Private college	2%
Other	4%

Results and Analysis

The significant response is that 68 percent of students intend to take another NSCC program. The reality, based on 1999 and 2000 enrollment statistics indicates that 47 percent will actually continue their studies. This represents BIT students enrolled in second level programs. It does not account for students who may have chosen a program outside of the Business Area. Faculty that I spoke with indicated that the high employment rate and availability of entry-level positions may mean that students are successful in finding employment and therefore do not return to register in September. One of the faculty members for a second level program at an urban campus said, *“the best BIT students apply for second level programs, but they are also the most likely to find full-time positions before the program starts in September.”* It is important to note that by the time my survey was conducted many students had already left the BIT program. The reason most often given by students, according to official NSCC student surveys, for why they are not continuing their studies in a second level program is “financial need.”

Table 5: Awareness of Programs

Table 5 is useful to assess how students learn about community college. It questions the role of formal and informal networks to determine which sources of information about post secondary programs are the most important to students when they make their decision to attend community college. Do they rely on other students? Family? Friends? Faculty? College calendars? Other sources? What knowledge do they have of the labour market and the education required to obtain careers?

Table 5. How much do you know about business programs?

Question	Rural	Urban	Total
	“Yes” responses		

Do you know what job opportunities are available for BIT graduates?	70%	58%	64%
Are you aware of where former BIT graduates are employed?	49%	37%	43%
Are you aware of where graduates of second level programs are employed?	43%	32%	38%
Did you discuss career/education plans with faculty or staff?	50%	56%	53%
Have you talked to employers about career opportunities?	47%	30%	39%
Did you discuss with faculty or staff career opportunities for graduates of second level programs?	47%	43%	45%
Did you look at the NSCC calendar for 2001?	85%	71%	78%
Did you discuss with faculty or staff the second level programs available to you?	61%	60%	61%
Did you have the opportunity to talk to current students taking second level programs?	58%	36%	47%

Results and Analysis:

In every category, except question four, rural students were more likely to have had more opportunity for contact with faculty and students or possess more information on programming. The smaller size of the campuses and the fewer number of students may be a factor, along with the culture of particular campuses. It may be concluded that better career counseling because of the lower ratio of faculty to students is taking place on the rural campuses. *"I guess it's the instructors that put the thought in you. We have small, tight classes. They're always there to talk to you about your plans"* (rural student).

As a group, rural and urban students tend to rely more on the College calendar for information; 85 percent of rural students looked at the calendar and 71 percent of urban students. It is unlikely that the calendar is reviewed in class or even introduced to students by faculty or staff.

Rural students are more aware of job opportunities for BIT graduates, 70 percent compared to 58 percent for urban students. Neither rural nor urban students had a great deal of information on current students in the second level (diploma) programs or graduates. For the total group, 43 percent knew where BIT graduates are employed; 38 percent knew where graduates of second level programs are employed; 45 percent talked to faculty or staff about career opportunities for graduates of second level programs.

In conclusion, if we view these percentages as our internal or relationship development with students, there is opportunity for growth. Table 5 may be viewed as an indication that students know little about their current program and less about the second level programs. *"I was completely unsure of what I was doing. I was unsure about BIT and if I should be in it"* (urban student). Given that Table 2 revealed that preparation for employment was the number one reason that

85 percent of students selected the program, information on graduate employment should be of interest. Sixty-eight percent selected preparation for a second level program as important to their decision to enroll in BIT. It is possible that without information on programs, students, and graduate employment they are opting not to continue in a second level program. Further study would be needed to determine how students view the information presented to them; for example, we would need to know if the college calendar is considered easy or difficult to read and interpret.

Table 6: Salary Expected

Given that accurate salary data is available through Statistics Canada (2000), which shows that the average annual starting salary for an administrative position is \$24,000, and The NSCC Graduate Follow-up Survey 2000 (see Appendix 11) reports that the average annual starting salary for business graduates is \$19,261 for students with a one-year certificate and \$21,125 for students with a two-year diploma, it is possible to determine how realistic student salary expectations are, prior to entry to an NSCC program. What are student expectations? Are these expectations likely to be fulfilled?

Table 6 is used to determine the salary a student would expect after completion of one year (choosing to look for employment instead of returning to complete a second year concentration). This expectation may be a contributing factor to the high rate of attrition. The questions in Table 7 are designed to explore what benefit, increased salary a student expects to receive by completing a second year of study at the NSCC.

Table 6. What are your salary expectations, if you choose to look for work after graduating from BIT? (In you first year of employment)

Salary Expectation	Rural	Urban	Total
Less than \$16,000	10%	11%	11%

\$16,100 to \$20,000	24%	22%	23%
\$20,100 to \$24,000	27%	22%	25%
\$24,100 to \$28,000	27%	30%	29%
Over \$28,000	12%	15%	14%

Table 7. What are your salary expectations, if you graduate from a second level program? (In your first year of employment)

Salary Expectation	Rural	Urban	Total
Less than \$16,000	0%	0%	0%
\$16,100 to \$20,000	8%	2%	5%
\$20,100 to \$24,000	20%	8%	14%
\$24,100 to \$28,000	27%	34%	26%
Over \$28,000	44%	50%	45%

Results and Analysis

The tables indicate that the students have higher than realistic expectations of salaries. Based on the graduate follow-up survey, a BIT graduate can expect to earn an average of \$19,261. A graduate of a second level program can expect to earn \$21,125.¹³

A Student's Cost/Benefit Analysis

The reality is that from a one or two-year community college business program students cannot expect to compete on an equal footing with a business graduate

¹³ Ensuring that students are aware of the job market and the salaries associated with chosen careers may alter these unrealistic expectations. It may be particularly important to make students aware of the salary increases that may be achieved by remaining for an additional year of study. Comparisons to the general population and to graduates of four-year university programs would be useful. It would also be worth investigating lifetime earnings and opportunity cost. Fifty-three percent of the current graduating BIT class is not returning to the College for further study. Given the employment rate of 80 percent, a large percent of this group is likely opting to earn the lower salary. Further research would be required to determine the economic consequences of this decision. What are the long-run consequences of staying an additional year? What is the opportunity cost of the decision?

from a four-year university, particularly on the basis of income. The challenge is to calculate the opportunity cost for both the university and the community college student, with the goal being to determine the differences in the economic and social benefits that accrue to each form of post secondary education. There are students who select the NSCC business program because they believe that the savings in three years' fees and income far outweighs the advantage to completing three additional years of study and starting at a higher income. The average starting income for a business student is \$19,261 according to the NSCC Graduate Follow-up Survey, 2000; also, the starting salary for a business student from a two-year community college diploma is \$21,125; this would compare with an average starting salary of \$35,000 per year for a business graduate of a four-year university program (Atlantic Universities Graduate Follow-up Survey, 2000). Furthermore, the unemployment rate for those with a university degree is 4.2 percent; for community college students it is 8.5 percent, for those with only high school completion it is 9.7 percent; for those with less than high school it is 15.9 percent (Human Resource Development Commission, 2001). Additionally, HRDC reports that a community college graduate with a certificate or diploma in any area will earn on average \$21,000; a high school graduate, \$19,000; a university graduate \$35,000. In summary, there is a significant advantage gained by attending university; while the difference between high school and a one-year community college certificate in earning and employment is \$2,000 and 1.2 percent, respectively. This finding supports the hypothesis that community college graduates of one-year programs enter jobs that offer low salaries; thus, they do not experience increased mobility as a result of having graduated from NSCC.

The location of community college campuses close to home and the affordable fees is regarded as the best place by "experimenters." For parents and funding agencies, a business education at a community college represents the least amount

of cost for the greatest amount of benefit.¹⁴ A student enters a one-year business program that has an employment rate of 73 percent and an average starting salary of \$19,261 per year (NSCC, Graduate Follow Up Survey, 2000). This high employment rate, despite the low starting salary could be achieved with one year of business study up until September 2001; it now requires two years of study. It is worth noting that in one focus group of twenty urban students, fifteen said that they would stay for only the first year of the new program and leave because of the good job market in the healthy 2000/2001 economy (prior to the brief recessionary period that followed September 11th). They felt that the diploma would not matter as much to employers in their hiring decisions as the fact that they would have the basic computer and accounting skills needed to find an entry-level clerical position. The early employment results for June 2001 confirm the belief of these students. Prior to graduation, many students found employment with very little active job search. In one urban class of twenty students, fourteen had been hired before completing their program in June 2001. One student, who holds a Bachelor of Arts in English, in addition to his one year BIT certificate, received a starting salary of \$34,000 per year as an accounting clerk. A younger student with high school and the one-year Business Information Technology program received a starting salary of \$32 per hour (an above average rate of pay for a new college or four-year university graduate). These represent exceptional circumstances, but they reflect the opportunity that does exist for business students.

These scenarios of success are more common at the urban campuses; however, it is more difficult to achieve the same results at rural campuses because of the limited number of employers in the local area, and students are not willing to

¹⁴ The research of Stephen Ball (1997) provides a useful social context for how schools are chosen by parents. I have not incorporated the findings into the main body of this thesis because it does not directly address post secondary education; however, there is an underpinning connection. Ball notes that for working class parents their choice of school for their children is closely tied to community, location, and family. He further notes that long-range planning and goals take a back seat to practical concerns, such as availability of public transportation.

relocate to areas where employment rates are better. It is also worth noting that at the College level where policy is established, this experience is not apparent to those responsible for policy. The College makes decisions based on the average outcomes, given that the rural to urban ratio of students is 67 percent to 33 percent, this means that the average income and employment rates are substantially reduced. Policy is therefore aimed at improving these deficiencies for rural campuses, which do not exist for urban campuses. However, rather than recognize the different sub economies of rural and urban areas, one strategic policy is applied to all campuses.

Table 8:Choice of Programs

This table goes one step beyond the previous tables to determine how many students have actually registered for specific second level programs at the NSCC.

Table 8. Have you applied to a second level program?

Response	Rural	Urban	Total
No Response	1	2	3
Yes	61	62	123
No	63	38	101

Results and Analysis:

123 students indicated that they would enroll in a second level program at the College, which represents 54 percent of the sample surveyed. For the College overall, 47 percent of graduating BIT students registered for programs in 2000. Business Administration Accounting was the most popular program, being selected by 34 percent out of 123 students. CSMS was selected by 19 percent, followed by 12 percent selecting Business Administration Marketing. For the

academic year 2000 there were 225 BIT graduates enrolled in second level programs.

It is also important to note that attrition for 1999 was 44 percent: 523 students graduated, while 417 did not complete their studies. The attrition rate for 2000 was 48 percent, with 431 students not completing out of 913.

Table 9: Reasons for not Returning

Table 9 questions students about why they are not registering for a second level program at the NSCC. This question is asked after having determined the number who are registering or planning to transfer to university. What reasons do students give for not continuing their studies at the NSCC?

Table 9. Why are you not registering for a second level program?

Reason	Rural	Urban	Total
Job opportunity	13%	18%	16%
Financial	27%	26%	27%
Plan to look for work	46%	41%	44%
Program location	4%	6%	5%
Personal/family needs	10%	9%	10%

Results and Analysis:

There is little difference between rural and urban campuses for students' decisions not to register in a second level program. The most common reasons are seeking employment, 44 percent and financial, 27 percent. These two factors are closely connected. They are also related to the importance of fees and program location. Funding and student loans would also play a role; however, for purposes of scope, they were not investigated in this research. These results suggest that immediate financial concerns are paramount to community college students in their decisions

about whether to persist with their studies. For students from lower socioeconomic groups financial needs may lead them to accept a low-paying job after one year of study.

Table 10: Decision Time

This table is specific to the second year program. The objective is to determine when a student first gave consideration to applying for a specific second year business program. Is it a decision a student makes prior to entry to the first year of the NSCC business program? Is a first-year student influenced by faculty, students, or by other sources?

Table 10. When did you first consider applying for a second year business program?

Grade or Semester	Rural	Urban	Total
Grade 10	1%	1%	1%
Grade 11	1%	0%	1%
Grade 12	6%	4%	5%
Prior to registering for BIT	40%	49%	45%
During the first semester	22%	31%	28%
During the second semester	28%	13%	21%
Other (university, work, etc.)	1%	2%	2%

Results and Analysis:

The results are consistent with the focus group responses and related data (Tables 12 and 13, and focus group survey data) indicating that very few students have decided on the NSCC business program in high school (1 percent, 1 percent, 5 percent). Focus group data supports the finding that most students have determined that they will continue on to a second level program before they enroll in the BIT program. *"I came to register for PR and found that I needed to do BIT first. So, yes! I knew what I wanted to do before I arrived"* (2nd year student).

Faculty at both urban and rural campuses have some influence on a student's decision to register for the second level concentration in two-year diploma programs. It is also possible that faculty and support staffs at the urban campuses have a declining level of influence on the decision of a student to continue his or her studies – 28 percent in the first semester to 21 percent in the second semester. The rural campuses show an increase in the possible influence from first to second semester (22 percent to 28 percent) of faculty and staff on student decisions to register for second level programs; however, there could be other factors that are not apparent, such as, a student may simply take longer to decide on second year options. This may indicate the necessity to make contact with students early, perhaps prior to registering (i.e. student orientation). It may also be a directional arrow pointing toward the need for more formal advising and career/education information early in the first year of a program.

Would students who received more information on programs, graduates, and employment early in the first semester be more likely to register for a second level program?

Table 11: Influencers

Table 11 is designed to establish a priority for people who informally and formally influence a student's decision to attend the NSCC; specifically, the decision to register for a two-year concentration. How much influence do family, friends, peers have over education and career decisions? How much influence do faculty and student services of the NSCC have on these decisions? The table also indirectly speaks to the assessment of the value of a community college education held by each of the potential "influencers."

Table 11. Which of the following people had an influence on your decision to register for a second level program?

	Rural	Urban	Total
High school teachers	4%	4%	4%
High school counselors	3%	4%	4%
NSCC faculty	14%	15%	15%
NSCC staff	7%	6%	7%
Other counselors			
Family members	22%	26%	24%
Friends	18%	17%	18%
Spouse/significant other	8%	6%	7%
Employer	4%	3%	4%
Current students	11%	12%	12%
Former students	9%	7%	8%
Other			

Results and Analysis:

Table 11 shows that high school teachers and high school counselors have limited impact on a student's decision to register for a second level program. This is not surprising given that most students are *not* coming directly from high school.

NSCC faculty and staff have only a limited influence on the decision to register for a second level program, 15 percent and 7 percent of students indicated that they had any influence at all. Family members and friends have the most impact, 24 percent and 18 percent, respectively. Private trainers have capitalized on this knowledge by using television advertising specifically aimed at the influences of family and friends on the decision to choose a post secondary business education. The influence of family and peers is more important than the influence of NSCC faculty. The NSCC, through faculty and support staff, has less of an impact on student aspirations than does the influence of family and peers, which indicates that social networks play a stronger role in the formation of community education and career choices.

Table 12: Perception of the Campus

The perception held by employers may have a direct impact on their decision to employ community college graduates. It is also a comment on the value placed on the knowledge and skills that community college students bring to the market.

The table presents the total for rural and urban campuses combined. There were only two answers where the urban and rural campuses varied by more than 5 percent, as follows: For “reputation with employers” rural students picked “3,” “agree” 8 percent more often. Rural students selected “3” agree for reputation with family 6 percent more often.

Table 12. How much do you agree or disagree with the following: The Campus that I attend has a good reputation with...

A “1” represents “strongly disagree” a “3” represents “agree” and a “5” represents “strongly agree.”

Person(s)	1	2	3	4	5
Employers	2%	2%	37%	35%	22%
High school teachers	1%	6%	51%	28%	14%
High school counselors	1%	6%	50%	32%	11%
Family	2%	5%	43%	38%	17%
Friends	2%	4%	44%	36%	14%
Community members	2%	5%	43%	36%	14%

Results and Analysis:

The question of the perception of a NSCC campus that is held by those people who have the potential to influence a student’s decision is presented in Table 12. This table specifically looks at campuses, rather than the larger umbrella of the

NSCC. The assumption was that a campus might be viewed separately from the larger institution of the NSCC. Chapter Seven on attrition will address the role that a student's perception of the campus and community college's image plays in their decision to continue or to drop out.

Students' perceptions of the favourable reputation of the Campus are in the following order, using an answer of "4" or "5" for strongly agree:

1. Employers, 57 percent
2. Family, 55 percent
3. Friends, 50 percent
4. Community members, 50 percent
5. High school counselors, 43 percent
6. High school teachers, 42 percent

Students' perception of a favorable reputation being held by employers would appear to be significant, when preparation for employment was ranked as the number one reason students enroll. *"Some past employers I worked for recommended the course"* (urban student). The support of family members and friends may be reflected in their perceptions of the College. *"My old roommate and friend took Public Relations here and she really liked it. She got a really good job, and she highly recommended the College to me"* (urban student). Throughout the research, particularly the focus group responses, students indicated that high school teachers and high school counselors held the College in very low esteem. In some cases high school teachers and counselors actively discouraged students from attending the NSCC. *"I went to high school in Antigonish, and there was no mention of anything other than university. When the universities came to the school I remember being shoved into the room. I wanted to do something practical, so I went over to the College booth. I was the only one there"* (rural student). The College is making progress toward an improvement in reputation

and image; however, there is still room for improvement. There were comments from students that the College was still pejoratively referred to as the “Vocational” school. *“The TV news said that the government is planning to take away university as an option for people on social assistance. They said that we would be kept in low paying jobs, and I thought that not everybody who attends community college ends up in a low paying job. That goes back to the whole concept of vocational school”* (urban student). This is not a new phenomenon, as evidenced by the research of Clark (1960) who supports this student’s view, noting that:

There are connotations attached to the word “college” that are slow to change, remaining relatively unaffected in the minds of teachers and the public by new terms and symbols. One of these attached meanings is that the quality of any agency claiming to be a college is to be judged by the brightness of the students and the standards of its staff. This belief, supported by academic tradition and the status rewards of quality, would appear to be constantly at work undercutting a diffuse, comprehensive image (Clark, 1960, p. 173).

Table 13: Perception of the NSCC

Table 13 is exploring the perception held of the NSCC by those people who may directly or indirectly influence a student’s decision to enroll at community college. It provides a broader look at the value placed on the institution.

Table 13. How much do you agree or disagree with the following: The Nova Scotia Community College has a good reputation with...

A “1” represents strongly disagree, and “3” represents agree, and “5” represents strongly agree.

Person(s)	1	2	3	4	5
Employers		1%	30%	40%	29%
High school teachers	2%	2%	42%	36%	18%

High school counselors	2%	2%	42%	41%	13%
Family	2%	4%	39%	36%	18%
Friends	2%	3%	38%	40%	17%
Community members	2%	2%	37%	39%	18%

Results and Analysis:

There were no significant differences between the rural and urban campuses; any variation was 4 percent or less.

Students' perceptions of the favorable reputation of the College, using "4" or "5" to indicate strong agreement, are as follows (the percent of students selecting "4" or "5", indicating a strong reputation):

1. Employers, 69 percent
2. Friends, 57 percent
3. Community Members, 57 percent
4. Family, 54 percent
5. High school teachers, 54 percent
6. High school counselors, 54 percent

Students feel that the NSCC has a very strong reputation with employers. This correlates with the previous findings that the students are motivated to attend by the possibility of potential employment. *"The reputation of the program is excellent. My girlfriend got a job earning \$28,000 to start after graduating from BIT"* (urban student). Presumably, students would not attend if they believed that the College did not have a strong reputation with potential employers.

High school teachers and high school counselors are perceived by students to have a higher regard for the College than for the Campus. This may point to the impact of institutional advertisements or lack of impact of Campus advertising. It would also call into question the relationships of campuses with feeder high schools. High school teachers, high school guidance counselors, university professors tend to present a negative image of the NSCC.

"One professor said to my friend, "This is not a community college. This needs to be much better"" (rural student). A BIT student reflected the attitude of her high school counselor in this statement, "My Guidance Counselor said, "You can go to university or work at McDonald's."

Approximately 40 percent of our current BIT students indicate that they received limited information on second level diploma programs. They also indicated that they would like more information on where graduates are employed, along with general career information.

"I wish that someone would tell us at the start of the year what kind of jobs we can get" (urban student).

In conclusion, the survey results provided a broad spectrum of data that could be used to interpret the hypotheses; however, a greater depth of understanding was needed. The focus group data presented in the next chapter provided the necessary rich qualitative interpretation of the questionnaire responses. One should also be reminded that focus groups were used prior to the development of the questionnaire to guide the development of questions.

Chapter Six

Focus Group Data and Analysis

Although community college students consistently describe their identities as multifaceted, multisourced, and multilayered, the colleges that they attend are more likely than not to define students in much narrower terms (Shaw, 2000, p. 169).

Focus Group Research

The objective of the focus groups was twofold: first, to use the discussion to guide the development of a questionnaire; second, to collect the voices of the students to permit a rich understanding of the data that leads to the testing of hypotheses through student interpretation of: (i) the prospects for careers that represent upward mobility; (ii) self-image and the image of the NSCC in relation to social class; (iii) whether the NSCC helps students to meet their educational and occupational goals. Many of the insights from the focus groups have been woven throughout the thesis to illustrate points, create context, and explore: (i) the reasons why students decide to attend NSCC; (ii) the significance of credit transfer; (iii) the hierarchy of knowledge taught at the NSCC, and hence the status of the NSCC among post secondary institutions; (iv) why students 'experiment' at the NSCC and if it is related to class.

Nine focus group sessions were conducted with three groups: (1) eight applicants who had been accepted for the 2000/2001 college year, but declined to attend; (2) thirty-eight current (2000/2001) BIT students; (3) twenty-five second year students who had completed the BIT program in June 2000. The focus groups represented the rural and urban population in proportion to the NSCC business student population of one-third urban and two-thirds rural.

It was difficult to locate and convince people who were not attending the College to participate in a focus group. Assembling a focus group of eight non-attending participants required 110 phone calls. The eight participants from outside the college were paid \$25 for the two-hour session. I was not, however, successful in forming a focus group of people who were accepted but did not attend at either of the two rural campuses. There were too few applicants to choose from and those who were successfully contacted were unavailable or unwilling to attend.

Forming focus groups with BIT and second level business students was relatively easy. Students were excited about the opportunity to share their experiences. In addition, the administration and faculty of the campuses, Akerley, Halifax, Lunenburg, and Strait were enthusiastic about the opportunity to participate in the research. It was more challenging at the rural campuses to form focus groups of second year students who had graduated from BIT, given the small number of BIT graduates who were enrolled.

The focus group data will be presented by giving the responses to the survey from each of the three groups: (1) Accepted but declined to attend, (2) BIT students in second year programs, (3) BIT students for the 2000/2001 program.

Focus Group Responses

Group 1: Accepted but Declined to Attend

The focus group was comprised of four males and four females, one First Nations and one international student. Two participants were 18, two were 23, one 26, one 41, one 45, one 48. Two were current university students, and one had attended a private college.

Reasons for Applying

All eight participants indicated that acquiring employment skills was the most important reason for applying to the BIT program. The work experience component was selected as the next most important reason for applying by seven participants. Preparation for a second level program of study ranked third, being selected by six participants.

The participants were employment focused, with all eight participants indicating that improved employment opportunities and improved income opportunities were their reasons for applying.

Options Considered

Five of the eight respondents indicated that work or another NSCC program were the other options that they considered. Seven of the eight applicants did not consider private colleges as a viable option. They considered the fees to be too high, and the reputation of the College to be better.

So...the Campus...a lot of my friends went there, probably close to fifty. You can get a trade within a year and get a job. The BIT program I did research that quite a lot. I did end up taking the equivalent to it last year anyway. I took a four-month program in Sackville that gave me the exact same description as this. It was called Quest. It was a computerized program, but it was way more expensive. I got a job with the RCMP (urban student).

Influence

The NSCC calendar was considered the factor most influencing the decision to apply by four of the eight participants. High school teachers and counselors were considered to have no influence. Only one participant selected family and friends as significant influences.

Reason for not attending

Financial need was the reason for not attending given by six of the eight respondents. Two respondents said that their parents wanted them to attend university. One of these respondents indicated that she had been actively discouraged from attending the College by a high school counselor. The second respondent was working to convince her parents that the NSCC was a viable alternative to university. *“My parents wanted me to get a university degree, rather than a diploma”* (rural student).

It is important to note that a limitation of this research enquiry is that it does not address the “non attenders” who did not apply to the NSCC. The first focus group included students who applied and chose not to attend; however, there is no representation from people who would be eligible to attend but did not apply. There is most likely a group who could not afford the fees or the time away from work or family responsibilities to attend community college. This stratum of the working class poor is not reached by the NSCC, nor were they included as part of this research enquiry, which is a limitation of the research.

Group 2: BIT Students in Second Level Business Programs

This focus group was comprised of 25 students. The urban campuses were represented by 11 females between the ages of 19 and 24. Nine females and five males represented the rural campuses. The age range for the rural campus was much broader, with nine students between 19 and 29; the remaining five students were between 30 and 50.

Reasons for Applying

- 96 percent indicated that preparation for employment was most important
- 88 percent rated both “learning job skills” and “general learning” as most important

- 80 percent rated the “work term” as most important

Options Considered

Private colleges were considered as an option by 2 out of 25 students or 8 percent. University and work received equal weight, being selected as the next most likely option by 28 percent of the sample. Another NSCC program was selected by 52 percent of students as the most viable alternative to the program in which they were registered. It is possible that the sample could have realized that jobs were not available or that they would not receive credit for College courses. There is also the student who uses the community college as a stepping stone to prepare for university transfer, as explained by the following student: *“I have it all mapped out. I knew I would come here for two years, do the BIT program, take a second year and go to University for two years”* (urban student).

Influences and Sources of Information

The most used source of information about programs is the NSCC calendar, with 48 percent saying that reading the calendar was how they made their decision about programs. Respondents selected friends as most important 24 percent of the time, followed by family at 20 percent, and high school counselors at 8 percent.

Group 3: BIT Students from the 2000/2001 Program

This focus group comprised 38 students, 23 from urban campuses and 15 from rural campuses. The average age for the urban students in the focus groups was 25. The average age for the rural students in the group was 30. The age range for the urban students was 19 to 34. The age range for the rural students was 19 to 64. There were 10 females and 13 males representing urban students. There were 11 females and 4 males representing rural students. It was not possible to achieve gender balance, although it was a goal of the research. The smaller BIT classes made it more difficult to get a large representation of BIT students from the rural

campuses. The focus groups provided the opportunity to delve deeply into the underlying attitudes and influences that could not be explored through the questionnaire.

Reasons for Applying

- Improved income was selected as most important 95 percent of the time.
- It was surprising that the second most significant reason for choosing BIT was “general learning,” selected 92 percent of the time. “Self-improvement” received the same weighting, being selected 92 percent of the time.
- Employment skills were next, being selected 89 percent of the time.

The indication is that BIT students are “experimenters.” They select the program for general improvement and hopes of a better income; however, the specific details of the program and the accompanying requirements and occupational choices may not be apparent. This finding was corroborated in the focus groups by a number of students who indicated that they did little research on the program, and they were not sure of what they had registered for: *“I had no idea of what the business program was all about. I thought that the “IT” in “BIT” meant it would be all about computers”* (rural student). A common theme in the focus group sessions was the expression that students thought that they were enrolling in an “IT” program, with a strong focus on computer skills. Students explained their surprise when they discovered that they were required to complete courses outside of the computer area. This theme was prevalent at both urban and rural campuses. It should be noted that a limitation of this research is created by not having separated focus groups by age to assess the different responses based on age.

Options Considered

- Work was considered most often 55 percent of the time
- University and another NSCC program received an equal weighting at 32 percent
- Private colleges were least often considered options at 16 percent.

Influences and Sources of Information

The NSCC calendar is the greatest source of information 58 percent of the time. Friends and family were selected 29 percent, and 21 percent of the time, respectively. High school counselors and high school teachers were selected only 2 percent of the time. Given that the calendar is such a significant source of information, it would warrant further research to determine how it is introduced and used. How is the calendar read and interpreted? Is it a positive or a negative influence? Is it introduced to students by faculty? Staff? Does the student seek it out and interpret it individually or as part of a class?

Focus Group Insights

Themes emerged around the image of the College; the positive interaction with faculty; the power of word-of-mouth advertising; the lack of information that students have when making decisions about programs; the importance of faculty advisors; the lack of geographic mobility of students. In the next few pages I will explore these themes in greater depth.

In many cases the students select the Business Information Technology program with limited information. They are most likely to rely on the advice of friends; followed by a look at the College calendar. Their overall contact with the campus they have chosen is usually limited. High school guidance counselors and high school teachers tend to hold the image of the College as a trade or vocational school and do not recommend business programs to students; in fact, some students were actively discouraged from attending. One focus group student explained how her high school counselor told her that she was too intelligent to attend a community college and should attend university. Several students agreed with this student, saying that it was difficult to obtain information on the NSCC from their high school counselors.

The influence of parents, family, friends and social network speaks directly to Bourdieu's concept of social capital theory:

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity – owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (Bourdieu, 1997, p.51).

When I spoke to second year students during the focus group about how and when they made their decision to enter a second level diploma program there was a similar response. They tended to have decided before they enrolled in the first year of the Business Information Technology program. I was anticipating that they would have entered the program unsure of what they wanted to do and been influenced by the faculty. This did not hold true for approximately 25 percent of the students. They were not experimenters, but knew exactly what they wanted to do and how they would use the first and second level programs to meet these goals. They come in with a strong motivation to succeed because they have clarified their goals and have a satisfactory academic background, although this area may need to be strengthened. These students tend to be in their mid-twenties, usually taking a second chance on education, but less likely to be experimenting. During focus group sessions these students were likely to have said that they knew someone who had graduated from the program or they spoke with employers about their objectives and how the BIT program matched their career goals.

The influence of faculty tended to be more in the role of supporting student decisions rather than as influencers. Students at both rural and urban campuses spoke highly of their experiences with faculty in the BIT program and in the second level programs. They often talked about how they were treated as equals by faculty and made to feel that they were active participants in their learning.

Students emphasized the importance of small classes that afforded frequent contact with faculty. It was important to students that they called faculty by their first names and so established a more collegial relationship. It was also pointed out how important it was that the classes were intact working groups that attended all classes together and developed supportive relationships. At a rural campus students discovered that they were wasting time during their free periods and approached their instructors with a plan to lengthen the College day from Monday to Thursday and take Friday off. They felt empowered by the faculty's willingness to accommodate this request. The quote by Shaw (2000) that follows is evidence of how important it is that faculty contributes to an open learning environment:

Faculty committed to multiculturalism tends to see education in a broad sense. For them, a community college education is more than preparation for a job. This faculty feels that one of their roles is to get students to think for themselves in terms of multiple roles: as family members, as residents of a community, as citizens of a country. Several faculty talk about how education can be used to bring out these multiple roles and how the classroom can be a vehicle for interaction and learning among students. To engage students, faculty tries to create open and accepting learning environments" (Shaw, 2000, p.116).

The group of students who attended university prior to enrolling at the NSCC had many insights on the College, based on their university experience. They found university too large and too impersonal. For the most part, they selected university because of family and peer pressure. They explained that it is simply expected of most students that they would attend university. The students along with their families and peers believed that university provided a first-rate post secondary education and community college was something much lower on the scale.

Friere (1993) would argue that the positional power of those who have access to university allows them to claim its superiority.¹⁵ Private trainers are in a unique position in the hierarchy of post secondary education. There were students who saw private colleges as inferior to community college, even though the fees are much higher. There were students who believed that upper socio-economic groups view private trainers as the only alternative to university based largely on the prestige that goes along with high fees. Overall, community college students that I interviewed felt that you paid a lot more to receive a lot less. They saw the curriculum and course offerings as inferior to the NSCC. The facilities were also compared, with students saying that they did not want to attend college in a shopping mall. The argument that students believed that the education was better because the fees were substantially higher did not hold true. Few students seriously considered private colleges, less than ten percent actually gave any serious consideration to attending a private college. There is little doubt that the substantially higher fee (as much as ten times that of the NSCC) is a significant barrier. University was the number one alternative choice of education. The next choice, other than attending university, or attending NSCC was to work.

Credit Transfer to University

The focus groups were asked how important it was that their courses could be accepted as credits by universities. The responses were interesting, but quite varied between focus groups survey responses. Also, there was variation within the focus groups. The opportunity to delve deeply into the qualitative responses unraveled some insights, as follows: First, acceptance of community college courses as credits by universities was most important as a validation of the NSCC and that the program of study enrolled in by students in the focus groups was a

¹⁵ The research of Paulo Friere is referenced; however, it is not explored extensively. It is appropriate to note that his research on adult education as a means for liberating the working poor has a theoretical connection to this research. Friere's work was primarily in the area of basic literacy; however, the concept of education for liberation could easily be a theme of this research enquiry.

legitimate post secondary program. At a rural campus located close to a university, students were concerned that their community college credits were not recognized as being legitimate by peers, more than acceptance of those credits by the universities; however, it was important to them to be able to tell friends that their courses were as rigorous as university courses by virtue of the articulation agreement between the NSCC and the local university. *"My friends at university think that the courses they take are at a higher level. My courses here are more difficult than the ones I was in at university last year"* (rural students). For these students, it is more a matter of credentialing than it is a matter of them looking for the opportunity to actually have their credits recognized for transfer. The focus group research shows that the majority of students are interested in a direct route to employment. The NSCC markets itself as a post secondary institution dedicated to preparation for employment. This goal is in direct contrast to American community colleges and junior colleges that have university transfer as one of their significant goals.

NSCC is working hard to establish articulation agreements with universities. This work is important to improving the image of the College and in turn validating student's perceptions of the Community College as a legitimate post secondary institution. At the present time the universities are inconsistent in the credits they award to a student from the business programs at the NSCC. It will depend on the university, the campus, and the student. Some universities will award more credits than others; some campuses and particular students will receive more credit. Students have received as many as five half credits and as few as no credits from the same university for the same program. The NSCC has twelve different campuses offering the same business programs; however, there is little question that the quality of the students and the programs is different from campus to campus.

The issue of transfer credits and students continuing on to university has not been fully explored in Nova Scotia; this is not surprising given that the NSCC is merely fourteen years old (founded in 1988). It can be argued that the College serves an important role by providing students who are not ready for university with an opportunity to learn marketable skills as they “stop out” from university study. What the future might hold for community college students is difficult to predict. There are two students who come to mind when I think of the potential of a community college education. The first student, who I will call Charlie, declared in class that he would complete his business courses and enroll in a university science program, eventually to enter medical school and become a doctor. This student, whose wife was also in the program, managed to accomplish his goal of becoming a medical doctor. His success defied the odds, given he was in his mid-twenties with two children. Another student completed her business program and an information technology diploma program, and she transferred to university and went on to become a dentist. Both of these students followed their dreams, which lead them outside of the business career that they had prepared for at the NSCC. Of course, these success stories are exceptional cases of experimentation with community college, yet they make one think about the importance of not restricting or defining students too narrowly.

Community College Credibility

When we think about transfer of credit, we most often think of students from the NSCC moving on to further study at university.¹⁶ There are a number of students,

¹⁶ The question of transfer of credit from the NSCC to university begs the question of whether community college business courses are post secondary to the level where they are worthy of receiving university credit. A comparison of college and university courses is a difficult task; however, an opportunity presented itself this year in the form of a student teacher. The student teacher was teaching Marketing and Introduction to Business at a local university, while teaching the same two subjects at the NSCC as part of an education practicum. I interviewed the teacher and asked him to compare the course curriculum, evaluation criteria and the performance of the students. His response was that the course curriculum was the same. He was using the same evaluation tools at both the college and the University. He felt that the students earning the top grades at the college would be the same students earning the top grades in his university class. He did,

approximately ten percent, who complete university degrees in the arts or sciences, and then they come to the NSCC to take a one-year business diploma. These students are, of course, the most successful in finding employment in above average paying positions. Earlier in this thesis I gave an example of one such student, with a Bachelor of Arts in English, from the graduating class of 2001, who received an attractive job offer prior to graduation at a rate of pay of \$20 per hour. It is worth noting that students with degrees are often among the top 20 percent in grade point average; however, they are not usually among the top 10 percent in grade point average.

This brings us to a significant area of contention, which are the Advanced Diploma programs of the NSCC that require a university degree for admission. BIT students see the requirement for a university degree as a further demeaning of the value of their community college education. The credential provides greater access to employment and higher rates of pay; however, Karabel (1977) would contend that educational opportunity eventually leads to educational inflation, which devalues the community college credential, as follows:

As lower socioeconomic groups attain access to a specific level of education, educational escalation is pushed one step higher. When the high school was democratized, sorting continued to take place through the mechanism of tracking, with high status children taking college preparatory programs and lower status children enrolling in terminal vocational courses; similarly as access to college was universalized, the allocative function continued to occur through the provision of separate schools, two-year community colleges which would provide an education for most students that would not only be different from a bachelor's degree program, but also shorter. The net effect of educational inflation is thus to vitiate the social impact of extending educational opportunity to a higher level (Karabel, 1977, p. 235).

however, feel that the weaker community college students were weaker than the students in the lowest grade range at the university.

In September 2001 one of the second year diploma programs, Public Relations, moved from the status of a diploma program that admits business students after they have completed one year of business to an Advanced Diploma that no longer accepts students with one year of business. Because the program is popular, students are aware of the change in entrance requirements, and they have challenged the change. One of the arguments is that the current graduates of the one-year BIT program have been as successful, and in some cases more successful, in the PR program than the students who have university degrees. They further argue that they believe that the College has an obligation to support students through their planned routes of study. Denying them access to a program in favour of a four-year university graduate further devalues their NSCC business education. The students face the need to defend the legitimacy of their community college education to those outside the College, and they feel that they should not have to challenge the Community College to receive validation. The business students felt that the College was reinforcing a message that a university degree was a more legitimate credential than a community college education.

It does seem hypocritical for the College to say, "We will educate you here. It's just as good as a university education." But, if you want this Advanced Diploma program, you'll actually have to go to university. They are saying that our Community College education is just as good as going to university. When it comes to applying for another program, it's all of a sudden not as good any more as a university degree" (urban student).

An additional issue is that Advanced Diploma programs are in high demand and the number of applicants is usually in the 150 range for the 30 seats available, which are kept at this range to ensure that the supply of students does not exceed demand by employers. The large number of applicants means that NSCC students would be consistently passed over for students with university degrees, even if they were deemed qualified for admission. So, despite the argument that the university degree plus the diploma are essential for credentials and employment, this, according to Grubb (1999), is a legitimate challenge where the College

should support the authenticity and validity of community college learning by giving students equal opportunity to gain admission. Grubb (1999) says that before we can understand what community colleges can become, we must see them as they are now.

Part of the debate about what community colleges *should be* is a debate about what they are. Are they in fact “people’s colleges,” providing expanded opportunity to nontraditional students, or are they simply mechanisms for “cooling out” these individuals by diverting them away from four-year colleges and into lower-status institutions or lower-status paths like occupational education? (Grubb, 1999, p. 350).

College and Campus Image

Students from both rural and urban campuses expressed their concern about the negative image of the Nova Scotia Community College. *“A lot of the counselors...if you want a mechanics course, or you want a welding course, that is what community college is for. It’s not for computers and things like that”* (rural student). It was not intended that image would be explored in the focus group sessions; however, it became a topic of discussion at most (six out of eight) of the sessions. *“I went to university for a year, and when I decided that I didn’t want to go back...and someone mentioned Community College. And I thought what would people say about me?”* (urban student). Comments similar to these were heard at most sessions; *“To them (friends) it (community college) was a place for people who couldn’t do any better”* (rural student). Students indicated that there was a feeling among their friends that attending community college was something that you did when you could not get into university. The following student comments illustrate the concern about how the image of the College is perceived: *“Well I’m constantly in defense of the Community College, more so than the PR program, because people don’t have stereotypical views of the PR program; they have stereotypical views of the Community College”* (urban student).

In the next comment, it is obvious that students struggle to elevate the College above the status of a vocational school. The image of the vocational trade schools that were once located in the buildings that house the NSCC campuses remains strong.

"I just think its because a lot of people have this concept that they (Community College) offer "trades" here. They don't consider that there is a fine arts program, PR or ACAP, or anything like that. I just find that, right now I'm working at Lawton's and there are a lot of customers, regulars that come in, and we just start talking, and I tell them that school has been hectic, and they ask where I'm going. I say Community College, and they say, "Oh, the Vocational School on Bell Road." And I say, "The Community College on Bell Road" (urban student).

Two students suggested that the word "community" be removed from the name of the college to improve its status." *It shouldn't be called Community College at all; it should just be called "College." As soon as you put the word "community" in front of it people get the impression that we're like complete idiots...you almost feel the need to explain. When I say that I take PR here, I have to say I went to university, but I didn't like it there. It's not that I couldn't get in to university"* (urban student). Dougherty contends that community colleges in their efforts to serve the many varied needs of students create the contradiction described by this student:

The noncollegiate program has merit in that it recognizes that the community college's attempt to balance academic, vocational, adult, and remedial education has created a host of contradictions and difficulties. In trying to be a jack-of-all-trades, the community college often ended up being a master of none (Dougherty, 1994, p. 248).

Current BIT students also addressed the image of the Community College. The issues were the same as those presented by the BIT students in second year programs. *"I went to apply for a library card at the university and they asked if I*

was a student. I showed my student ID and the person on the desk said, "Oh, you're just a community college student" (urban BIT student). Clark (1960) saw that the image and sense of identity of community colleges was blurred and lead to confusion, as described in his words:

An effort then, to sell a new junior college to outsiders and to achieve a secure status in the general society is likely to be successful if the organization has a sense of identity and communicates it in acceptable terms...The uniqueness of the terminal work is of special value, at first glance, in building and projecting an identity, since a unique operation can be used to claim a distinctive place in education. But since diffuse commitment is a central aspect of character, the claim of unique function tends to become submerged and blurred in with other functions. Needed in the comprehensive college are self-conceptions and educational formulae that embrace and rationalize diverse programs...The construction of the image requires that it be understood, accepted, and assimilated by the personnel of the college and then explained to outsiders (Clark, 1960, p.172).

It is evident that the College has not yet left behind the negative image of a "vocational school" and moved into the arena of contention as a legitimate postsecondary institution. The College is better known as a trade school, an image that is detrimental to the School of Business.

A more global image issue is the pejorative connotations that are attached to being a "community" college. This attitude was expressed by a second level business student who said, *"Why can't we just be a "College" and drop the "Community"?* A strong perception exists that a community college is where you go when you can't get into university. Students are constantly bombarded with negative images of community colleges.¹⁷

¹⁷ Two recent television programs presented these images. *Saturday Night Live*, an international show shown on NBC, ridiculed community colleges with a spoof on "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" with a show called the "Community College Bowl," where comedians played community college students taking courses such as hair combing

This same negative image of colleges is not held in other provinces. In the provinces of Alberta and Ontario there is an almost equal split between students choosing university and students choosing college (Statistics Canada, 2001). The reputations of the colleges are as strong as universities. The most reputable colleges are not known as community colleges, but simply as colleges (i.e. Humber College, Sheridan College). The contradictory message is that to best serve the community the College must discard the word “community.”

Social and Academic Integration

According to Dougherty (1996) the community college’s greatest failure is its inability to socially and academically integrate students into colleges through the offering of campus residences and activities. The NSCC is lobbying the provincial government for funding to construct a large “hub” campus with a complete campus structure, including a residence, which is considered an essential step toward student integration.

Various studies demonstrate that community colleges indeed do not integrate their students socially and academically as strongly as four-year colleges. They very rarely afford their students the opportunity to live on campus, whereas the majority of universities do (p. 88).

The community college’s inability to successfully integrate students may contribute to high rates of attrition (Examined in Chapter 9). There is also the possibility that some students may chose not to integrate socially or academically for personal or social reasons related to their desire to ‘experiment’ with a

technology. The contestants were unable to answer any questions. Their colleges were presented through photographs of run-down buildings in poor neighborhoods. One of the largest target markets for *Saturday Night Live* would be 18 to 30 year olds (The NSCC advertised on this program in 2002). The same pejorative image was portrayed on a local television show called *Trailer Park Boys*. Two low-income youths are in a discussion about where they will attend school; of course, the local community college is the only choice mentioned.

postsecondary education. The next section presents the voices of students from the focus groups as they describe their reasons for experimentation.

Voices of ‘Experimenters’

In the initial focus groups that I conducted, there were many students who were identified as “experimenters.” The reason why they felt the need to experiment, rather than follow a more direct path through education required investigation. Business programming at the NSCC represents a pragmatic choice with low risk. The decision to attend may be based on an uncrystallized direction of future education and employment goals. *“I didn’t know what I wanted to do. And my mother said a business course will give you something to fall back on”* (rural student). Business becomes a practical choice given that it will provide much needed and transferable accounting and computer skills. The one-year commitment to earn the Business Information Technology (BIT) certificate is not a major time constraint, and the fee is low at \$1,950, when compared to university fees of \$5,000, and the skills taught are practical and marketable. Having taught over 3000 business students in the past 20 years, I was not surprised to hear students in the focus groups say that they had no idea about what the BIT program included and how it specifically prepared them for the employment market.

The survey and focus group results provide the evidence necessary to understand how students differentiate among the most significant reasons for choosing the NSCC. Two significant areas of interest to students were the low fees and convenient location. It is, therefore, not surprising that they were unsure of the details of the one-year BIT certificate program (2001) and the two-year Business Administration program (2002). Many students expressed their surprise that the program included general business courses. They actually thought that they had enrolled in an Information Technology program that would be entirely directed toward computer studies.

I didn't have a career goal. I was completely unsure of what I was doing. I really didn't know much about the BIT course, and if I should be in it. I thought it was pure computers. And I'm just thankful that someone brought the second-year Public Relations to my attention, because if they hadn't, I probably would have gone out into the workforce after BIT and been in a job I didn't like. Yeah, so, when I took BIT I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I didn't like university, and I didn't want to take a year off. I was afraid that if I took a year off, I wouldn't continue to educate myself (urban student).

This comment from a student who entered the business program with limited knowledge was repeated by many others, *"I can't remember why I decided on BIT. I thought why pay \$6000 for university to figure out what I want to do, when I could do the same thing for \$2000"* Many are confused, thinking that they have enrolled in a primarily "IT" program. *"My marks from high school weren't the best to get into university. So, I applied to the College, and I didn't know what I was taking at first. I thought it was all about computers. And then I got into the program, and it's all about Accounting and Business Math, and I was like, "Oh no!""* (urban student). A rural student echoed this sentiment when he spoke on behalf of his classmates. *"If you think about it, the name of the course, Business Information Technology, you're not thinking of communications like grammar and mathematics...I mean, I wasn't. When I think of that name, I am thinking technology, right off the bat. And I want the technology. I want computers."*

Summary of the Focus Groups

The majority of Business Students are:

- not mobile.
- "experimenters" taking a "second chance" at education.
- highly sensitive to location and fees.
- in need of more information relating to career and education goals.

- most likely to be between the ages of 20 and 29.
- almost as likely to leave before completing their Business Information Technology (BIT) program as they are to complete the program; attrition rate of 44 percent. London (1991) best describes the complexity of the lives of community college students in comparison to traditional university students in the following words:

The lives of community college students are in many ways, defined by complexity. In contrast to more “traditional” college students, community college students are more likely to be employed either part- or full-time; to have spouses, children, or both; and to encounter financial or logistical difficulties that make attending college a difficult endeavor. In fact, for many students, community college attendance often represents a real attempt to improve their social status – a process that can be fraught with confusion regarding one’s definition of self (London, 1991, p.802).

The next chapter will investigate how the complex lives of community college students, described in this chapter, impacts the rates of attrition. Chapter Seven will more fully explore the two contrasting hypotheses; specifically, an evaluation of whether attrition is an institutional or personal failure will be the focus.

Chapter Seven

Community College Attrition: A Revolving Door

The NSCC attrition rate of 44 percent for 2000/2001 represents a promise of postsecondary education unfulfilled for many business students. The high attrition rates are not a new phenomenon for the NSCC or for North American community colleges. The attrition rates for the NSCC have remained between 40 percent and 47 percent for the past five years, which is comparable to the rate of 44 percent for North American community colleges, reported by Tinto (1993).

In order to place Tinto's research (1987 and 1993) in perspective, one must remember that this is framed in the American two-year college system, which is designed to encourage transfer to four-year colleges. The NSCC, and to a lesser degree, the Canadian two-year colleges are more often seen as terminal institutions. It is, however, important to present Tinto's research findings, given that this research enquiry has reported that the NSCC is following the lead of other Canadian colleges and moving quickly toward the establishment of articulation agreements with universities. In particular, business programming provides a logical flow from community college to university, with the universities granting credit for similar courses completed during the first one or two years of study in the business programs at the NSCC.

This chapter examines attrition by attempting to separate the influences 'beyond the control of the student' from the areas under the influence of the student; recognizing that it is often difficult to discern where one begins and the other ends. The goal is to determine when the reason for leaving represents a student decision 'beyond the control and influence of the community college.' In order to accomplish this goal it is necessary to more fully understand student intentions upon entry. Accordingly, I surveyed new business students; specifically, I asked

them to indicate their education and career goals. The purpose was to determine when a student's departure reflected recognition by the student that the community college was not the right choice for a postsecondary education at this time.

The decision by 44 percent of business students in 2000/2001 to leave the NSCC business program should not come as a surprise, when we consider that a significant percentage of students have been found to enter without having clearly defined their goals and may come to view their decision to leave as a positive experience. They now know that they do not want to pursue a business education and the resulting career in business.¹⁸

Tinto (1987) argues that it would not be appropriate for the College to view attrition by mismatched students as an institutional failure: "If the leaver does not define his/her own behavior as representing a form of failure, neither should the institution" (Tinto, 1987, p.132). In contrast to this point of view, one could argue that the College has a greater responsibility to help students clarify their goals prior to admission. Later in the chapter I will discuss how the NSCC has failed these students by creating a centralized admission process that greatly restricts student access to counseling and advising with admission and program selection. There is, however, no denying the reality described by Tinto (1987) that many community college students who are experimenting would decide that the program is not the right choice for them.

The point here is really quite simple-namely, that a potentially large number of individuals will choose to depart from an institution of higher education because they have come to see that further participation no longer serves their best interests. In some cases that may reflect differences in goals. In either case it is quite likely that

¹⁸ Over my twenty years of teaching I have interviewed many students who viewed this process of self-discovery as a success and not as a failure. In the cases of these students it would not be useful for the NSCC to have taken action to provide remedial support in an effort to retain these students in their original program of study.

many such persons will not understand their leaving as representing a form of educational or personal failure. Indeed a good many may view their leaving as quite positive forms of behavior (Tinto, 1987, p. 133).

An underpinning objective of this chapter is to explore whether this high rate of attrition represents the NSCC's "cooling-out" (Clark, 1960) of student educational ambitions and a mismatch of student and institutional goals. This examination of attrition is accomplished by presenting the case for the NSCC business program. A specific look at the NSCC rates of attrition may question whether: (i) the NSCC has created anything more than the illusion of an open-access, democratic postsecondary education where anyone regardless of background has an equal opportunity to earn an education; (ii) there are external factors, such as social class that determine attrition. The study of NSCC attrition rates in the context of the wider body of research on attrition at two-year colleges will set the stage for the evaluation of the college's effectiveness in meeting student needs. The following quote by Wyman (1997) emphasizes the importance of understanding attrition:

Often a central component of evaluating institutional effectiveness is the careful study of retention rate. Used properly, knowledge of retention rate magnitudes and trends for various student types can help decision-makers effect institutional improvements such as decreased enrollment volatility, decreased recruiting costs, increased graduation rates, decreased financial aid expenditures on noncompleters, and increased academic performance of students through adjustments and policy changes in areas such as admissions, financial aid, curriculum design, course scheduling, and student support services (Wyman, 1997, p.1).

The NSCC Case

In September 2001 the NSCC implemented two initiatives anticipated to ameliorate the high rate of attrition in the business programs. The first strategy was to increase the one-year Business Information Technology program to a two-

year Business Administration program. This would allow weaker students the opportunity to complete remedial courses, and it would prepare them for advanced study. The second change was the implementation of a mandatory post-admission placement test for mathematics, written communications, and computer skills. This process was intended to enable the identification of the entry-level qualifications of students to determine their preparedness for college study. The majority of students were expected to receive exemptions from the need for basic remedial courses. The basis for this prediction was that students who were selected to the College were required to have a grade 12 or equivalent; given that the test would be designed for this level; a high pass rate was anticipated. This expectation was certainly not supported by community college research for North America. Eduardo Pardon's (1994) research on community colleges revealed that approximately two-thirds of entering freshman test deficient in one or more basic skills. Pardon's research was corroborated by Chaffe (2000) who reported that at LaGuardia, a large American community college, 85 percent of students tested were in need of remediation in writing, reading, and oral skills. Hoyt (2000) provides research to show that the greater the student's need for remedial programs the higher the probability of attrition. Hoyt (2000) further argued that the mission of American community colleges to serve a diverse population of under-prepared students would result in high attrition rates:

Community colleges serve many students who are under-prepared for academic studies. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NEC), approximately 41% of community college freshman needed remedial education in 1995 (US department of Education, 1996). This lack of preparation creates greater challenges for student personnel at community colleges who are trying to help them have a successful college experience (Hoyt, 1999, p. 1).

An additional expectation of the NSCC was the assumption that the minority of students who required remedial courses in math, written communications, and computers would have special individualized learning contracts prepared by faculty. These basic assumptions resulted in no new resources being devoted to

remedial programming. It was anticipated that no additional faculty or special tutorial service would be required that could not be covered by current faculty; correspondingly, there were no new funds or budgets established. This poor forecast may be accounted for by the limited amount of research on community college attrition and retention. "Very few studies of university and community college leaving have been done in Canada (Dietsche, 1990; Gilbert, 1991; Corman, Bar and Caputo 1992)" (Butlin, 2000, p.8).

Extensive research has been conducted on retention in higher education using different methods and approaches; most of the research, however, has been conducted at four-year colleges and universities rather than at community colleges (Hoyt, 1999, p. 9).

The limited amount of study on retention means that the practices instituted to alleviate attrition are often not based on sound theory. The testing process described in the next section is one such practice that may do more harm than good.

Placement Testing: A New "Spin" on an Old Process

Testing is a convenient way to place in remedial programs students who are deficient in the academic requirements necessary for success in business programs at the NSCC. The College recognized the unpopularity of the testing process and the placement of students in remedial programs; the response was to attempt to change the nomenclature around the process. Business faculty members were advised to use a "marketing spin" and advise students that they were being assessed in order to be given credit for their prior learning experience. This secrecy and deception was not a good way to start a process that was designed to assist students. The "spin" was compounded by a dialogue of "testing-out" and the avoidance of terms such as "remedial." The test was called a "Placement Test," and the remedial courses were called "safety net" courses. The need for this "marketing spin" implies that there was a feeling that students could perceive this

process negatively. I researched this perception by conducting discussion groups with 95 business students from the class of 2002.¹⁹ I asked the students what they thought of the Placement Tests and the process. Students felt that it was a negative introduction; it was intimidating; there should have been a review of the material; they should have been given more detailed information about what would be tested. Student sentiment is best expressed by the following mature student's comment, as follows:

If I had been given a week or two to just brush-up on the material...I mean, like, it's been six years since high school for me. And, you know, I've been flipping burgers and stuff. You go "brain dead." It doesn't seem fair to use this test to make me feel dumb. I mean...I wanted to quit (First-year Business Administration Student).

“Testing-in” or “Testing-out”?

The exemption rate for the mandatory placement tests was abysmal, with less than 5 percent of students receiving credit for Business Mathematics Fundamentals, 25 percent for Business Communications Fundamentals, and 25 percent for Introduction to Computers. The remaining 95 percent in math, 75 percent in communications, and 75 percent in computers, did not receive the grade of 75 that was necessary to be awarded an exemption.

It is important to remember that the College did not anticipate the high failure rate. The expectation was that a greater number of students would “test-out” and receive credit for these basic skills that they would have learned through their previous education. The result would be lighter course loads and an opportunity to concentrate on more difficult subjects. It was not fully understood that the students who were least prepared would be the students carrying the heaviest course loads. The students in need of all three “safety net” options would carry a course load of six courses, while another student could conceivably be exempted

¹⁹ Informal discussion groups were held with three classes of students. They were asked to first record their comments and then to participate in a discussion.

from the three remedial courses and carry a course load of three courses for the first semester. The result is that the least prepared student, the most likely to leave the College, is given the heaviest course load. Hoyt's (1999) research showed a strong correlation between remedial courses and dropout rates, as follows: As the number of remedial areas increased for students at the College, their dropout rates consistently increased (see table 2). For example, 64 percent to 72 percent of students who required remedial education in three areas eventually dropped out of the College. In other words, high remediation rate had a negative impact with student retention (Hoyt, 1999, p. 7).

Prior to presenting the research on the outcomes and implications of the placement tests, it is necessary to take the time to study the nature of the tests, the process, the administration, and finally, the perceptions and implications for faculty and students. The pre-test process begins with the student being advised by a letter that he or she will be required to participate in placement testing during the first two weeks of classes. In order to place or exempt students from the remedial class, the tests are administered within the first week of the first semester. This is an intimidating introduction for many students who are reminded that they do not possess the necessary cultural capital required for success. Students who have experienced failure and are returning for a second chance at education are faced with an immediate threat of failure. Their orientation to college is three two-hour tests (The scope and weight of these tests really warrants the categorization of these evaluation tools as "exams."). For students who are "experimenting" and deciding whether this business program is right for them, they learn that they do not have the basic skills and will require remedial courses.

The NSCC's intention was that the test itself would help identify individual student strengths and weaknesses to allow for the development of learning contracts and individualized modules that are based on a personal portfolio

approach. “Basic skills programs, designed to overcome the limits to learning imposed by inadequate academic preparation, have grown enormously in the past twenty years, as access to higher education has expanded” (Hoyt, 1999, p. 2). In reality, the large number of students who failed the placement tests meant that faculty could not find the time to meet with over 123 students at the Halifax Campus in a reasonable time within the first semester to develop learning contracts. Considering that there are approximately 1000 students in the business program at 12 campuses of the NSCC, it would take a significant commitment of faculty time to administer, grade, and develop individualized programs, and monitor the programs. Unfortunately, there was no plan in place to account for these time constraints. As a result, individualized learning contracts worked in theory; however, the implementation and practice was not successful. Already over-worked faculty, who were coping with a completely new curriculum were unable, and in some cases unwilling, to do more than report to students who had passed and who had failed the placement tests. Individual student scores were not diagnosed and interpreted, and individualized modules were not developed to allow students to improve upon the areas of weakness uncovered by the placement tests. This process called into question whether the placement tests could in fact be used to properly diagnose student performance.

The placement tests clearly labeled over 95 percent of entry-level business students as deficient in math, 75 percent in communications, and 75 percent in computer skills. These results only have significance if the placement tests could be considered to be a reliable and valid measure of student performance. Are students deficient as determined by the test? Before answering this question, it is important to subject the test itself to sufficient scrutiny.

Testing the Test

The reliability and validity of the placement tests are called into question when one recognizes that community college faculty developed all three tests, and the

tests were not subject to any rigorous measures. Standardized tests did exist that were normed for the Canadian community college population; however, the decision was made to have small faculty teams develop tests to be used as standards for the 12 campuses.

The three tests contained material that a student could not know without actually taking the course. The content was too specific, rather than a test of adequate academic preparation, we were testing specific content that a student would be expected to know after having completed the courses. For example, a question on the math test asked students to solve for an unknown variable in an annuity equation. Annuities are an area covered in the second semester math course; as a result, the student is solving for an unknown variable in an area where he or she would have no context without having studied financial mathematics. A similar example is found in the request that the students write a business letter for the communications test. Once again, this is an area covered in the second semester business communications course. The tests did not sufficiently assess the student's prior academic preparation and were not valid because they did not measure what they were supposed to measure. In addition, these teacher made tests could not be validated based on either normative or criterion-referenced data. There were no rigorous standards established by testing the test against student performance on academic tests or ranking of student performance. In summary, there were no suitable anchors or comparative measures. Furthermore, teachers were not trained in the process of administering and scoring the tests. The results could be considered questionable. Albeit, the tests were developed and implemented; students were tested; the majority failed and were placed in remedial courses. The ambitions of the students were effectively "cooled-out" (Clark, 1960). The tests were a reminder to students that they were not strong academically, and perhaps even raised doubt about their decision to apply to community college.

This sense of failure for the students was equally shared by faculty who were now faced with the daunting task of labeling 75 to 95 percent of students deficient in one, two, or three entry-level math, communications, and computer skills. The faculty's frustration was compounded by the fact that they were not prepared in the skills of delivering individual remedial programming. Furthermore, the faculty did not feel comfortable using the placement tests as diagnostic tools to identify individual student weaknesses. It was left up to them, without guidance or criteria, to assess which areas of the test corresponded to diagnosis of a particular student's weaknesses. The intent of the College and the charge to the faculty was that the tests would be employed to diagnose student areas of weakness, leading to modification of the curriculum through the creation of individual models tailored to meet each student's needs. The intent was that students would be exempt from areas where they had demonstrated prior learning. The problem was that faculty could not determine which area of the test corresponded to particular areas of knowledge. Even if it were possible to employ the test as a diagnostic tool, the failure to establish acceptable anchors and comparison standards of performance meant that there was no reliability in the grading. In order to provide some check, five teachers marked the same essay to establish reliability of scoring. These teachers produced five different grades ranging from 50 percent to 80 percent for the same student essay, which was not surprising. In addition, several faculty members expressed their concerns over their ability to grade areas where they did not have specific competence, such as English grammar. It was not possible for a subject expert to grade 123 placement tests (estimated grading time 60 hours) and return the results in a reasonable time without the support of other faculty.

For the fortunate student who survived the admission's hurdle and the placement testing, there was now one more hurdle. The student would have to make it through remedial ("safety-net") courses, and they would have to persist through the most likely time of departure, the first semester. Tinto (1993) identifies this time period as the crucial time period for attrition, as follows:

We begin our study of departure with the first year of college. We do so because the first year proves, as we shall see in later chapters, to be an especially important year in the process of persistence. The character of one's experience in that year does much to shape subsequent persistence (Tinto, 1993, p. 14).

The unintended message delivered to the student by the placement tests and remedial programming was that they did not possess the necessary prior education required for success at the NSCC.

The authors who accounted for student transfer found that the need for remedial education at community colleges significantly increased a student's risk of dropping out of college (Clagett 1996; Vorhees 1993). In contrast, researchers who did not account for student transfer found no relation between remedial education and student persistence (Feldman 1993) (Hoyt, 1999, p. 2).

For the purpose of my research, the placement test scores served as a control variable to provide a quantifiable measure that could be used to interpret how student performance, based on entry-level test scores, impacted the decision to persist or leave the College. The results of the testing and the post and pre-test process warranted examination, independent of the correlations with other variables influencing a student's decision about whether to persist with his or her studies. These variables include the student's pre-entry education, career goals, parental education, age, and income. This data was obtained through a survey conducted with a sample of 123 students that were stratified to represent the ages and genders of the larger Business Administration population for reasons best described in the following quote by Hoyt (1999):

Several theoretical models have been developed to explain the influences that affect a student's decision to complete his or her college studies. In Tinto's model, retention is influenced by a student's pre-entry attributes, goals and commitments, and academic and social integration (Tinto,

1975, 1993). Bean and Metzner (1985) developed a model conceptualizing student persistence as dependent on a student's background, academic variables, environmental variables such as employment and finances, and social integration. Cabrera and others (1992) integrated the Tinto model and the Bean and Metzner model, finding that both provided unique insights but also measure similar constructs (Hoyt, 1999, p. 2).

A Model of Attrition for the NSCC

The purpose of this model is to identify the variables that have a direct effect on a student's decision to leave or persist with his or her studies at the NSCC. By gathering and analyzing detailed data on who leaves the college and why they leave, it is possible to test the hypotheses concerning student attrition. It should be noted as a caution that researchers, as demonstrated in the following quote, challenge this process of generalization from one institution, the NSCC, to the larger population of community colleges:

Canadian studies of postsecondary leaving typically focus on an in-depth examination of students at one university or community college (Lam 1984; Dietsche 1990; Pyke and Sheridan 1993; Johnson 1994; Montmarquette, Mahseredjian and Houle 1996). This approach has the advantage of gathering detailed information on the reasons that students gave for leaving university or community college, and various aspects of their postsecondary experiences. It provides useful institutional research for university and community college administrators to develop effective student retention strategies. However, it is difficult to generalize the results to the Canadian population of university and community college students. Postsecondary leaving experiences at one institution are not necessarily the same for other institutions (Butlin, 2000, p. 9).

Gathering Data

Individual surveys were given to 119 Business Administration students during the second week of classes in September 2001. The survey questionnaires were

divided into three broad question categories: (i) demographic data; (ii) previous education and exemption test scores; (iii) educational and occupational goals. The first category asked for socio-economic and demographic data: age, gender, number of dependent children, parental education.

The classic literature on persistence and college performance has generally concluded that background characteristics are the most reliable predictors of success. High school grade point average (GPA), socio-economic status, and parental education have continually emerged to predict persistence or college GPA (Astin 1975; Pantages and Creedon 1978, p.234).

The second section was dedicated to the collection of education variables in two areas: the student's previous education followed by the student's placement test scores in math, communications, and computers. The data permitted the determination of the student's educational preparation and the resulting requirement to participate in one, two, or three remedial courses.

The third category focused on asking the students for their career and educational goals. The purpose was to determine how their program of study at the NSCC could serve the student's goals. This category was selected to include Conklin's (1993) call for community colleges to incorporate measures of educational and occupational goals in the following way:

Thus, the question of student goals is critical to community college research in particular because student outcomes are properly gauged in terms of student intentions (Palmer 1988). Community colleges must incorporate other measures-attainment of educational goals, student satisfaction with various aspects of their community college experience, success in the workplace subsequent to completion of a course of study, and other such indexes-as components of a comprehensive assessment of institutional effectiveness (Conklin 1993, p. 2).

Grubb (1991) refers to the phenomenon of “milling around” to describe students whose nontraditional attendance patterns, which may be a function of their lack of goals, leads to poor choices of courses and failure to put together coherent programs that lead to graduation and employment. The result is that the flexibility of community colleges in programming, as opposed to “lock-step,” may add to the potential for students to “mill around” and not clearly identify goals, which in turn increases their probability of not completing a program of study.

Predicting Persistence in Business Programs at the NSCC

The survey was conducted during the second week of September 2001 with a stratified sample of Business Administration students at the Halifax Campus of the NSCC. The purpose of the survey was to conduct a pilot study to gather information that could be used to develop a model to determine how various variables may be used to predict a student’s odds of completing versus leaving the business program.. Each predictor variable was identified and held constant, so that other variables could be compared to this predictor variable. The following odds ratios were developed and tested through a statistical regression model using SPSS (See Appendix 9): Odds ratios were chosen as a method of statistical analysis because they provided the most efficient and clear method of describing the odds of a student taking one of two possible courses of action. For illustration, let’s say the probability of a student having grade 12 on entrance is 1.000; when the odds are above 1.000, say 1.450, the odds are 45 percent greater that the student will have more than grade 12; when the odds are less than 1.000, the student will have less than high school.

Research Results on Attrition (See Appendix 9)

- When compared to students whose parents completed high school (odds ratio 1.000), the odds of persisting through the first semester to register for and commence the second semester were 1.878 for students whose parents have education beyond high school. The interpretation is that for every 100 students whose parents completed high school and who persist; there

will be approximately 190 students whose parents have education beyond high school who persist. Conversely, the odds for leaving (.797) were greatest among those whose parent(s) did not complete high school; they were approximately 20 percent more likely to leave, when compared to students whose parent(s) had completed only high school. The interpretation is that for every 100 students whose parents have high school who persist, approximately 80 students will persist whose parents do not have high school; thus, they are 20 percent more likely to leave.

- There was a strong positive correlation between placement test scores and rates of leaving. The greater the number of exemptions received on the three placement tests, the greater the odds of persisting. For example, a student who received exemptions in all three placement tests had a 1.951 odds of persisting, while a student who received two exemptions had 1.901 odds of persisting. A student who earned only one exemption had a 1.897 odds of completing. The odds of a student persisting who had received at least one exemption will be significantly higher than a student who has received no exemptions (1.000). The odds of persisting at NSCC in the business program versus not persisting or leaving were 1.951, 1.901, 1.897, respectively for students who received three, two, or one course exemption, based on the entry pretests. The tests, while not proven to be reliable or valid when subjected to rigorous scrutiny, were accurate predictors of success for students who received exemptions. This outcome is not surprising when one considers that the standards for the tests were set so high (75 percent); for example, of the less than 5 percent of students who passed the math test, 95 percent continued on and graduated among the top 10 percent of class.
- There was no significant difference between males and females in leaving or persisting.
- There was a strong correlation between age and persistence, with the odds of persisting increasing with age, as follows: students below 25 had a .611

odds of leaving; students over 25 had a 1.688 odds or 68 percent greater chance of registering for second year.

- Students who are funded by government agencies, outside of Canada Student Loans, will have increased odds of 1.278 of persisting to register for second year. Students who have dependent children and a source of funding had increased odds of 1.302 of persisting. These students are most likely to be female; single; receiving funding; returning to education after having taken a year or more away from formal schooling. Despite the challenge of coping with raising children, these students are more likely to persist. They receive both financial support through agency funding and educational support through counseling and tutorials.
- Students whose education and career goals match programs and career opportunities that can be achieved through their studies in the business program had increased odds of 1.781 of persisting. The indication is that students who have not identified how the Business Administration program meets their education and career goals, “experimenters,” have a .820 odds of leaving before completing their first year of study.

This chapter was designed to take a specific look at attrition to create an understanding of how the NSCC rate of attrition may be interpreted within the broader system of community colleges. This interpretation will be used to discuss the two competing hypotheses that attrition is a personal failure rather than a systemic institutional and class failure. The results of the research on attrition presented in this chapter will be placed within the framework of the overall results for the research enquiry in the next chapter.

In summary, the results were as follows: (i) The higher the level of the student's parent(s)' income the greater the odds of persisting. (ii) There is a strong positive

correlation among exemptions, placement test scores, and student persistence. (iii)
There is no difference between males and females in their odds of leaving. (v)
Funded students are more likely to persist. (vi) Students whose career goals match
a program of study have increased odds of persisting over students who would be
categorized as “experimenters.” The result is attrition is most likely to occur for
students under 24, who do not have clearly identified education and career goals.

Chapter Eight

Research Enquiry Results

The previous chapter on attrition presented a detailed analysis that allowed for both a prediction of the odds of a student's persisting to graduate and a discussion of strategies for remedial programming.

The objective of this brief and important chapter is to present the results for the overall research enquiry, which will include the findings on attrition. This outcome will be accomplished by: (i) reminding the reader of the hypotheses that were tested; (ii) presenting a discussion of the research results; (iii) discussing the findings within the context of previous research.

The following hypotheses are arranged so that the first hypothesis tests the position of the advocates of CCs, and the second hypothesis, which is a mirror image of the first, tests the arguments of the critics:

Hypotheses Tested:

1.
(a) Community colleges offer students opportunities for upward mobility through recognition of course credits toward a university degree.
Or
(b) There is little upward mobility from community colleges to universities; in other words, students are trapped at a certain level of credential and limited in their job opportunities.

Results:

The research findings support the position of the advocates that community colleges do provide the opportunity for students to earn credit toward a university degree. This is particularly important for students who would otherwise have not had the resources, income or grades, to attend university.

Students, particularly graduates of a two-year diploma, are theoretically not trapped and have the opportunity for upward mobility. The avenues and opportunities exist for students to continue on to: (i) second year specialty concentrations at the community college; (ii) earn university credits through articulation agreements and eventually a degree.

The NSCC Graduate Follow up Survey (2000) reported that approximately 41 percent of one-year BIT students indicated that they continued their studies, 20 percent for one-year diplomas and 15 percent for two-year diplomas.

Discussion:

The NSCC Graduate Follow Up Survey, 2000 shows that 20 percent of graduates from business diploma programs pursued further higher education. There are students who used the community college as a foundation for entry to university studies in a variety of areas. Community college provides an inexpensive alternative because of the low fees. Students are able to earn university credits without paying university fees, which are approximately three times the rate of community college fees. The new two-year Business Administration diploma introduced in September, 2001 has included an increased emphasis on the establishment of articulation agreements with local universities to recognize community college credits toward degree requirements (as of May, 2002, two universities have indicated their intent to establish articulation agreements). At the time of writing most students were not taking advantage of the opportunity to have credits recognized toward a university degree; however, many articulation agreements had yet to be formalized.

Focus group data showed that transfer was not a consideration for many students. There were a large number of focus group students who expressed that they had neither the grades nor the income to pursue a university education. The accreditation agreements had the effect of raising the status of NSCC in the perception of students.

The second hypothesis holds true for community college students who complete the minimum period of study, represented by a one-year business certificate, and seek employment. The expected average salary for a business student with a certificate is \$19,261, which is almost \$5,000 below the industry average for that particular clerical/administrative occupation.

The hypothesis does not hold true for students who complete two-year programs, which provides partial credit towards a university degree. There is a corresponding increase in expected earnings of approximately \$2,000 to an average annual salary \$21,125 for a student with a two-year diploma. While the majority of students do not continue directly on to further study at university, they have acquired credits toward a degree and may return at a later date. These students would also be better positioned to earn professional credentials in areas, such as accounting. Further study would be required to determine if students actually do return to university or complete additional credentials.

2.

(a) Community colleges provide students with an education that prepares them for careers beyond low-end, low-paying positions.

Or

(b) The jobs students receive upon graduating from community college are low paying, largely dead-end jobs.

Results:

Community college business students accept positions at salaries 12 to 20 percent below the average for the occupation. The positions are entry-level clerical and are appropriate to the preparation provided by a one-year certificate and a two-year diploma.

The second hypothesis is true for students graduating from a terminal employment program of one-year duration. It does not hold true for students who complete two-year business diplomas.

Discussion:

The best test of this hypothesis is the examination of the actual earning power of graduates and their occupations upon graduation. This research enquiry is a case study of the Business Administration program; therefore, the salaries for business students, compared with the Statistics Canada (2000) annual earnings for employees in related occupations are presented. The entry-level salary for a clerical administrative position, such as accounting, payroll, and financial clerks is approximately \$24,000 (Statistics Canada, 2000). A business student with a one-year certificate was starting at an average salary of \$19,285; a student with a two-year diploma was earning \$21,125 (NSCC, Graduate Follow-up Survey, 2000, Appendix 11). Students are earning approximately 20 percent and 12 percent, respectively below the expected average annual salary of \$24,000. Tables 6 and 7 on page 60 show that student salary expectations exceed the industry average, with 71 percent expecting to earn in excess of \$24,100. The “Top Occupations” for graduates of the one-year BIT certificate were: customer service clerks, 10 percent; accounting clerks, 9 percent; administrative clerks, 8 percent; management, 8 percent; administrative assistants, 6 percent; administrative managers, 4 percent (2000 NSCC Graduate Follow Up Survey and Statistics Canada average annual income for 2000). The results suggest that the initial occupational destination of NSCC business students is primarily lower end clerical positions.

The choice of jobs available to a student is a function of the number of years of study and credentials earned. The real question here is whether an entry-level clerical position is considered a low-paying, largely dead-end job. For students with only a one-year certificate, it is difficult to progress beyond his or her starting salary. On the other hand, a student with a two-year diploma has an improved chance of gaining additional certification and accompanying promotion and pay increases.

Focus Group Research

Focus group research indicated that some students are prepared to accept a lower income position in business, over other low paying positions; for example, a student explained that while she could make more money as a waitress, she preferred to be in an occupation with better working conditions. *“I can easily make \$24,000 as a waitress, but I hate the job. With this program I’ll have a career, and the average starting salary is \$27,000”*

A sample of a typical job opportunity for a Business Administration student is presented in Appendix 11. This position was accepted by a business student at a salary equivalent to \$23,500 per year. The market for such positions is strong, with 88 percent of business students in a similar position (NSCC, Graduate Follow-up Survey, 2000). (See Appendix 11, Sample Career Advertisement.)

The Graduate follow-up Survey for the Atlantic Universities (2000) reports the average starting salary for a university graduate as \$35,000 for an entry-level management position. Further study is required to determine the level of progress possible in terms of salary and position for a community college student. Students with a community college diploma have restricted access to managerial positions, which limits entry to students with degrees. Karabel (1977) identified the monopoly held by universities as evidence in the following quote:

In recent years higher education has obtained a virtual monopoly on entrance to middle and upper level positions in the class structure (Karabel, 1977, p 233).

3.

(a) Students are drawn from diverse social groupings and not solely from the ranks of the working class.

Or

(b) The majority of community college students are from the ranks of the working class.

Results

The majority of students are drawn from the working class population. The demographic research for this thesis supported this finding. It should be noted that while approximately 60 percent of students reported that someone in their family had attended university, less than 15 percent of parents held a university degree²⁰. The limitation of this research is that data was not collected on parental income; however, data collected in the survey of business students showed that 78 percent of parents were employed in predominantly blue-collar positions.

Discussion:

The NSCC is representative of the larger body of community colleges, with its multifaceted mission to serve a diverse population that includes students: directly from high school; with university degrees, partial degrees, or unsuccessful university study; returning from industry; recovering from illness; a change in family situations. One condition under which community colleges could be shown not to reproduce working class students in working class jobs is if the colleges are heterogeneous in their intake.

The demographic research for this thesis shows that for the class of 2001: 20 percent of students were directly from high school; 68 percent were employed full-time; 7 percent were attending university; the remaining 5 percent represented were unemployed, recovering from illness, raising children, etc.

Social services agencies often prefer community colleges because of the one or two year time frames required to receive an education and find employment. The high rate of employment combined with low fees and easy access make

²⁰ Demographic research on the stratified research sample of business students showed that three of the students in the sample held degrees (two Bachelor of Arts and one Bachelor of Science). A further fifteen students had attended university for two years. Interviews with these students, those with degrees and partial degrees, resulted in similar responses, as follows: (i) They felt that community college would provide practical skills for employment; (ii) Those that were not successful at university attributed it to their inability to cope with the large impersonal university environment.

community colleges the first choice for many funding agencies (Human Resources Development Corporation (HRDC) and Employment Insurance, as examples) that support low-income students. A major controversy is brewing over a new policy to only fund students in Nova Scotia who attend college and not students who attend university. Community college students that I interviewed addressed both sides of the issue quite articulately. First, there were those who argued that it made the College look like an institution for the lower class. Also, restricting university access perpetuates stereotypes. The result is that students who might otherwise have gone to university will be locked into community college. The following quote from a NSCC student identifies the issue of perception of community colleges as preparing students for low-end positions.

Also, right now it doesn't help that the Community College is getting a bad rap. We talked the other day about the government cutting off students who were going to university. The people on TV said that they were trying to take away their options, trying to keep us in low paying jobs, and I thought not everybody who attended Community College has a low paying job. That goes back once again to the whole concept of vocational school (urban student).

The low fees and open access, combined with community colleges being the choice of postsecondary education for social services agencies, means that a larger proportion of working class students will be represented at community colleges. The diverse nature of programming and the multifaceted mission to provide a broad range of education results in a diverse student population; however, the working classes represent the majority.

4.

(a) The high attrition rate is an institutional failure in that it serves to "cool out" student ambitions.

Or

(b) The high attrition rate reflects personal failure.

Results:

Community colleges fail to meet the needs of the approximately 40 percent of students who dropout (44 percent for NSCC).

Discussion:

The high attrition rate may be attributed to four possible explanations as follows:

First, students, their families and friends are unclear as to the rules of the postsecondary educational system and how it translates into career opportunities. Second, they perceive that a community college education will not provide them with enhanced employment and education opportunities. Third, poorer students cannot afford the implicit and explicit costs of study and are likely to drop out. Fourth, the low fees make the community college the first choice of post secondary institutions for experimentation. Fifth, they need support and encouragement to engage in remedial education and they don't receive it.

Summary of Findings

Evidence for the first point of discussion that students are unclear of their choice of program is found in both the questionnaire and the focus group responses.

Table 2 on page 51 asked students to identify their reasons for choosing to study in the business programs at the NSCC. Fifty-two percent said that "preparation for employment" was very important; twenty-one percent identified the ability to transfer university credits as very important; thirty-six percent rated preparation for a second level program as very important. One interpretation is that forty-eight percent did not see employment as very important; seventy-nine percent did not see university credits as very important; sixty-four percent did not see preparation for a second level program as very important.

Overall, affordable fees and location of the program ranked second and third in importance, behind preparation for employment. A possible explanation is that while students rank preparation for employment most important (85 percent), the next most important factors are fees and location. For a student who is unsure of his or her goals and experimenting with post secondary education, there may be a strong preference to stay close to home and minimize the cost of their education.

Focus group responses (see pages 77 and 78) indicated that students in the one-year BIT selected their program with little knowledge of the educational components and occupational outcomes. The most significant reasons for choosing BIT were “general learning” and “self-improvement,” selected 92 percent of the time.

The hypothesis that students dropout because they see the community college as not meeting their needs in terms of preparation for employment and further education is not supported by the rates of employment and the establishment of articulation agreements. Students are aware of the 87 percent employment rate for graduates; however, the level of employment and income may not be at the level the student is seeking. This point is supported by this thesis, showing that 43 percent of BIT certificate students and 71 percent of second-year business diploma students over-estimate their potential earnings.

Students may believe that employers perceive community colleges as having a less favorable image as a source for employees. The question of the low status of community colleges and the poor image was an issue for students in the focus groups. Students expressed concern that the college ranked very low in the post secondary hierarchy and was still viewed as a “vocational school.” The survey results (page 67) showed that 57 percent and 69 percent of students believed that their campus and the NSCC had a good reputation with employers. The 43 percent and 31 percent, respectively who did not give a high rating to their opinion that employer perceptions of the community college were favorable is worthy of further research. Is it possible that those students representing the 44 percent attrition rate are closely correlated with the same students who have expressed a view that the community college does not have good reputation with employers? This hypothesis would warrant further study to determine the connection between student attrition and perception of the community college image. The evidence from this thesis points to the dropout being most likely to be

the result for the younger, 18 –24, less well prepared students, from households with the lowest parental income.²¹

The status of community colleges as an inferior postsecondary institution is *slowly* eroding (as illustrated by the focus groups, there is still a very long way to go before community colleges improve their images). Evidence of the improvement in image, with an emphasis on the community college's ability to help students find employment, is the enrollment in the NSCC of students with university degrees. This social, political, and economic shift calls into question Karabel's challenge that community colleges are at the bottom of the postsecondary ladder.

The community college lies at the base of the *stratification* structure of higher education both in class origins of its students and occupational destinations (Karabel, 1977, p. 246).

Two related hypotheses for further study on why students dropout are: (i) They and their families can't afford to not be in paid work; (ii) They come to realize that the differential in earnings between taking a BIT program and a high school graduate is very low (approximately \$2,000).

In conclusion, the results of the hypotheses testing are as follows: (i) Students are multifaceted in their needs, coming from diverse experiences, such as high school, work, raising families, and university. Students are, however, largely from the working class. (ii) One-year certificate programs prepare students for low paying jobs; while two-year diplomas offer the promise of greater access to university (more credits earned and articulation agreements) and enhanced employment opportunities. (iii) attrition represents a system failure to meet the needs of students who are less well prepared for postsecondary education and unsure of

²¹ The average age of "leavers" is approximately two years younger than "completers" (see page 202). Attrition is closely connected with age; therefore, further research would be required to determine the correlation among dropouts, age and class.

how their program translates into access to university programs and future employment.

The complex nature of these research results on attrition makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions. The complex and contradictory nature of the NSCC and the courses it provides presents a challenge to assess the many varied reasons for the high rates of attrition.

There is evidence from this thesis in Table 1, page 60 and Table 5, page 70 that suggests that a significant proportion of students do not understand the labour market relationship of a business education to employment. Table 2, page 63 shows that 85 percent of students responded that obtaining employment was their dominant reason for attending the community college. The responses in Table 1 to questions 1, 2, and 3, which focuses on their possession of information about the program and employment opportunities, indicates evidence of only a minimal awareness of employment opportunities connected to the business program. It follows that in responses to questions in Table 6, page 72, students (68 percent) overestimated the average salary they expected.

The students are not making wise choices to invest in education that leads to employment. The contention of this thesis is that these students are “experimenting” with a business education and they have not given much consideration to the outcomes that they hope to achieve, beyond a practical education, while they ponder their future. This throws doubt on the Theory of Human Capital, as described by Brown (2001):

Equally, motivation to learn and acquire skills is only partially explained in terms of economic incentives. Research on working-class youth in Britain has shown how cultural understandings of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ can lead young people to restrict their commitment to education and training, irrespective of a cost-benefit analysis of whether it is in their self-interest (Brown, et al, 2001).

Chapter Nine will examine the contradictory nature of the community college by placing the NSCC case study alongside the research of the advocates and the critics of community colleges. The analysis in this concluding chapter point to directional indicators for future programming and identify areas for further research.

Chapter Nine

The Challenges Facing the NSCC

The earliest battle was waged over the effects of the community college: Is it an avenue of opportunity for its working-class, minority, and female students, or is it a blind alley blocking off equality (Dougherty, 1996, p. 15)?

The concluding chapter provides the direction needed if the NSCC is to create the college capital necessary to increase the student's own human capital. This is accomplished by linking the border and vocational knowledge of the NSCC to culturally and economically valued knowledge and skills, thus creating a pathway for students, so that they don't see the NSCC or what they are learning as inferior to that of university students. The outcomes of the recognition of the student's social and cultural capital include: higher retention rates, increased likelihood of completion of advanced diplomas, more university transfers and the establishment of articulation agreements, and, eventually, increased employment in high skills positions. To accomplish these objectives it is important to make explicit the strategies for student success; particularly for students who enter without the necessary academic preparation. Closely connected to this idea is an examination of the role of the NSCC in preparing students for the high skills economy.²²

The chapter concludes with a recommendation for future directions and the identification of areas requiring further research.

Creating College Capital

Student success in community colleges is often determined by the fit of the institution's culture with the culture that the student brings into the college setting (London, 1978; Weiss, 1985; Valadez, 1995; in Shaw et al, 2000, p.127).

²² Lauder (2001) explains that increasing the skills of students is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient condition when it comes to the diffusion of these skills in the marketplace. The NSCC and the NS labour market are the conduits by which student skills are diffused. The key, two-part question is: Does the NSCC serve as an effective conduit for students to acquire the necessary high skills, or does it serve to exclude a social class of students?

Shaw (2000) believes that because community college populations are growing so diverse, it will be difficult to match students and college cultures. Shaw (2000) purports that one must understand the goodness of fit between college and student cultures in terms of cultural and social capital. The exchange value for each of the forms of capital is increased when the student's own social and cultural capital more closely resembles that of the dominant classes (Shaw, 2000).

Cultural capital refers to sets of linguistic and cultural competencies that individuals inherit by virtue of their family's class position (Bourdieu, 1977). Dominant classes give certain social values and status to language forms, sets of meaning, qualities of style, modes of thinking, and types of dispositions (Giroux, 1981) (Shaw et al, 2000, p. 127).

Community college students enter the BIT program with various intents, including: a trial year of discovery; preparation for employment; credit transfer to university. It is important to understand how the campus culture might match the needs of the diverse student population. There are a variety of variables that contribute to the creation of a campus culture. These variables include the formal and informal curriculum and the interactions between faculty and students. The most significant capital that a student possesses is the background education and motivation necessary for success. The high attrition rate of students reflects the fact that most students do not have the strong educational background required for success. They are the students who are taking a second chance on an education, often because they did not have the educational background. Also, they may not have the motivation because they are experimenting with a college education, and they are unsure of their choices.

Community College students are disproportionately working class, nonwhite, or academically weak, and these are the very students most likely to drop out of Community College (Astin, 1972; U.S. National Center for Educational Statistics, 1977b:22' 135-136, 150; idem, 1989b:5, in Dougherty, 1996).

Dougherty says it is much more...

Something about community college causes greater attrition even when we control for the ways in which their students differ from those entering four-year colleges” (p. 86).

Dougherty further notes that the open door policy means “lower persistence” by students. He believes that community college faculty is cognizant of this and responds by setting low standards, which creates a compound effect of more lack of interest, less motivation and persistence by faculty and students (p. 90). This is evidenced in the business program in the change taking place in the curriculum for September 2001. The one-year BIT program was an intense curriculum that included seven compulsory courses. The new two-year Business Administration program has reduced the course load and the level of the content in an effort to reduce attrition. Lower expectations are being set through a reduction in course content and an expansion of the program from one to two years. For the few students seeking advanced study or university credit this will present a barrier.

Supporting Student Success

The NSCC offers support to students who do not possess the necessary educational backgrounds. NSCC, Student Services provide subsidized tutorial support and remedial courses to assist students. Shaw (2000) and Rhoads (1996) further refine the nature of a community college student’s lack of preparation to include the marginalized student’s deficiency in cultural capital. The idea is that working class students do not possess the academic cultural capital necessary for success. Working class students would discover that their cultural capital in the form of academic preparation is not valued as highly as the culture and knowledge of the dominant classes.

Further student support is found in the informal curriculum through events such as orientation, which is offered at all NSCC campuses. It also includes athletic events and community events that add to an active campus life and provide cultural capital. In addition, it also shows the cultural values of the campus,

students, faculty, which contribute to social capital. In addition, there are the student events that reach out into the community through volunteer activities. Food and blood drives and related student activities are part of campus life. Students develop a sense of connection and belonging to the campus that facilitates the development of social and cultural capital in the following way:

Faculty responsiveness to student needs cultivates networks of civic engagement that facilitate coordination and communication leading to collective benefits, i.e., the formation of social and cultural capital” (Shaw, 2000, p. 142).

Emotional and Cultural Capital

Emotional capital is created when students are given the chance to reframe their experiences from expecting limited skills training for niche markets to expecting to be prepared for careers in business (Shaw, 2000). One way to accomplish this goal is to make students aware of the accomplishments of successful graduates. The business program is designed to teach students the skills most valued by employers. Students from middle class families are looking for the skills that will prepare them for management careers. Students from working class families are searching for the practical skills that will land them the entry-level positions. Shaw (2000) references Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus,” history producing the practice that serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy for working-class students. How does the BIT program break this “habitus” and find the opportunity for more than low-paying jobs? The change from the one-year BIT program to a two-year Business Administration program is designed to provide a broader education and the accompanying career opportunities and eventual economic benefits. To prepare students for more than entry-level jobs requires a curriculum and delivery process that goes beyond the learning of basic competencies for employment through skills and drills methodology. The Fordist method of teaching will not prepare students for a postmodern world and its accompanying career opportunities. Developing students who are critical thinkers and team players capable of adapting to changing work environments is creating emotional and cultural capital. Kincheloe (1995) notes that the high-tech workplace requires

employees who are critical thinkers at the intermediate and higher end of the market.

We once taught in ways that reflected the methods of mass production, in the process emphasizing knowledge over understanding. Because of the demands of the high-tech workplace, industry now needs workers who value understanding and knowledge (Kincheloe, 1995 p. 57).

The Vocational School that I introduced in Chapter One embodied the teaching of compliance to rules and regulations, and it devalued creativity and individuality. It may be argued that it was an appropriate institution for the delivery of education in a modern economy. The Community College of the twenty-first century cannot serve students by delivering curriculum in the same assembly line fashion. According to Kincheloe (1995), the emotional and cultural capital of community college students will be impacted by the culture of the NSCC and the campus they attend.

A critical postmodern pedagogy of work embraces a new economics that takes the cultivation of human potential vis-à-vis the ethics of solidarity as its starting point...Such an economics would evaluate work and industrial production in terms of their contribution to the cultivation and use of intelligence (Kincheloe, 1995, p. 60).

Dougherty (1996) questions whether vocationalism is driven by businesses seeking publicly subsidized training or by entrepreneurial community college presidents carving out market niches (p 16). What is agreed upon is that community colleges do effectively meet the needs of business, and at the same time keep university enrolments in line by absorbing students at community colleges; students who would not have met, or only barely met university admission standards. Using the words of Clark (1960), community college “cools out” the degree aspirations of students who are not well prepared or financially capable of attending university.

These advocates describe the community college as serving the several central needs of society: providing college opportunity, training middle level workers, and preserving

the academic excellence of our universities (Dougherty, 1996, p. 17).

Creating Capital for a High Skills Economy

The *Vision Statement* of the NSCC reflects a College that is committed to developing students for “good work” that goes beyond the industrial or assembly line notion of work to a broader preparation for a postmodern economy.

Our approach to education will be one that engages Nova Scotians in new ways to apply knowledge and skill. We will integrate our education with community building and economic development. The College experience will inspire confidence, reflection, and self-reliance, challenging people to make use of what they learn, for their own benefit and for the benefit of us all (NSCC, Mission Statement, 2001).

Faculty expectations for students and the assumptions that are held will contribute to student identities. If faculty expects that they are preparing students for entry-level positions, will they treat the student in a different manner than if they believe that they are preparing entry-level managers? Issues of delivery methods and encouraging critical thinking and problem solving may be reserved for the university graduates who are most likely to use the skills in their first career. The NSCC has recognized this limiting expectation for graduates and promotes the development of higher-level skills, which is evident in the following words from the NSCC Mission Statement (2001):

Businesses are looking to the Community College to provide individuals who are innovative, highly skilled, and adaptable to change, and possess good interpersonal skills. Thus, the role of the Community College is changing to further meet the needs of the students and the community (NSCC Mission Statement, 2001).

Community college students would be expected to adapt to entry-level positions, which require more routine procedures. However, the progressive curriculum and proactive faculty member would recognize that if these high-level skills are not developed the community college students will not have the opportunity to

demonstrate their ability to assume positions of increasing responsibility. This process requires that the community college be willing to help the students change their experience and culture. Instead of living out the students' existing "habitus" the college reshapes and reinforces a broader opportunity and greater expectations, as described by Shaw:

Culture not only establishes the parameters for social interaction, it also provides a framework for how we define ourselves in relation to others. Definitions of the self and the other contribute to how identities are represented and understood (Shaw, 2000, p. 106).

Creating a Multicultural College

Shaw (2000) introduces the concept of the "multicultural college" where many cultures prevail and compares it to the "monocultural college" where a single more authoritarian culture is dominant. In the monocultural college the instructor who presents expected norms, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, convey socialization and education for the workplace. Community college faculties often view it as their role to provide students with the necessary social skills, including the discipline needed for success in the workplace.

"Inherent in much of the discourse among faculty and staff is a belief that docility goes hand-in-hand with being a good student" (Shaw, 2000, p114). Bourdieu (1986) challenges that some students possess the cultural capital that generates their knowing how to act in a manner that is rewarded by faculty.

Multiculturalism highlights the notion that multiple cultural identities exist within a society and therefore colleges ought to reflect the different ways of knowing and cultural forms diverse peoples bring to educational institutions (Shaw, 2000, p. 115).

A multicultural approach by NSCC business faculty would mean recognition that a community college education is more than just job preparation. The faculty member who supports a multicultural approach would view his or her job as an interactive discovery process of teaching, rather than transmission of information. We would see fewer lectures and more meaning making from students; an idea

that is incorporated into most models of adult education. Meaningful discussion, group activity, and more student lead processes would dominate the learning environment. According to Shaw (2000) meaningful community college education would acknowledge the prior learning of students, as follows:

Consistent throughout the discourse of multicultural teachers is a view of students as “equals” or as “partners” in the learning process. Although this group of faculty recognizes that they have expertise and knowledge that students might not have, they also believe that students bring a great deal to the college in terms of their own understandings. As one teacher explains, “The challenge is to share the knowledge I have and at the same time create opportunities to share with one another (Shaw, 2000, p. 118).

Shaw (2000) refers to Van Manen’s (1984) concept of “celebratory socialization” where the educational institution embodies this acceptance of diversity. He further references Giroux (1992) and Tierney (1992) who see community colleges making “border crossings” easier for diverse students. This chapter utilizes the notion of celebratory socialization to note how acceptance of critical cultural knowledge and values that ethnically diverse students bring with them serves as a bond within campuses. The students’ culture is accepted at the same time as they learn to accept the culture of the campus and the NSCC. The institutional structure of the College is not based on a hierarchical model; it is an intricate system of nodes connected by a “web of empowerment” (Tierney, 1992). Tierney’s (1992) concept of the web where students are active participants who reconstruct and shape the College’s culture is useful to understand how diverse student populations can be empowered by the college experience.

Within the context of the community college, students’ cultural differences can be an advantage if conditions are provided which enable the students to empower themselves by understanding their place in the world, and changing the relationships that constrain and silence them (Tierney, 1992 in Shaw et al, 2000, p.228).

What steps can campuses of the NSCC take to create this “web of empowerment” described by Tierney (1992)? Support programs for curriculum that includes

tutors and the opportunity to learn, allow students to acquire the education and skills necessary for college success. In addition to academic support, opportunities must be presented for students to connect with other students who share similar backgrounds. Avenues can be created for special groups, such as ESL students or students who are parents to share their challenges. How far the NSCC is prepared to travel in understanding and accepting the diverse cultures of students will have a profound impact on success rates and accordingly, attrition rates. Currently, other than a policy of acceptance of diversity, there is no active involvement in celebrating the differences of students. The processes are all informal, with no practice of attempting to formally bring together students who share common interests. The words of a president of an American community college best embody the idea that a community college culture should be the culture of the diverse student population it serves. "The challenge for us is not to have those groups become like us, but rather have the institution become like them" (Shaw, et al, 2000, p 191).

Behind the gloss of the rhetoric of access and diversity is the reality of monoculturalism that permeates the college culture of some, and perhaps too many, two-year colleges (Shaw et al, 2000, p. 197).

Recognizing Prior Learning to Create Human Capital

Faculty members of the NSCC are encouraged to recognize prior learning and acknowledge the experience and understanding the students bring to the classroom. Multiculturalists view education as a dynamic process of engaging in critical thought and discussion about the construction of knowledge. The faculty member does not serve to fill the students with knowledge; this is best understood through Freire's banking concept (1993). The portfolio practice of the NSCC challenges students to become reflective learners and to participate in their education. The degree to which a community college education creates reflective independent learners who can represent and critically think about their learning may be one measure of how successfully students will be employed in a

postmodern economy. The traditional view was that the college transmitted knowledge from expert faculty to novice students.

One step toward the recognition of the cultural capital of community college students is the acceptance of their knowledge as being at a postsecondary level. The establishment of articulations agreements not only facilitates the practical transfer of courses and the awarding of credits, it legitimizes the educational experience of NSCC students.

The Struggle Over Articulation Agreements

NSCC has a renewed interest in developing articulation agreements with universities. The goal for most students is not to receive credit, but the recognition that their program of study is at a legitimate post secondary level. The university is the legitimizing agent that exercises power over community college students. If the universities choose to grant credits and establish articulation agreements they are recognizing NSCC programs of study as equivalent to university courses. This means that while few students actually transfer and the goal of the NSCC business program is employment, transfer must remain a focal point. The success rates of NSCC students who do transfer to university have not been researched; however, the research on American universities points to a less than stellar performance. “Within one year of transfer, about one-fifth of community college transfers have been felled” (Dougherty, 1996, p. 96).

When asked about articulation agreements for business courses, the universities in Nova Scotia point to the difference in curriculum among the twelve campuses delivering the NSCC, BIT program. They also point to the differences in course outlines, outcomes, and hours for the same course taught at different campuses of the NSCC. The NSCC School of Business has responded by working toward standardization of courses across the college. Dougherty (1996) says that American community colleges have not made the necessary effort to match community college courses to the requirements of universities:

Credit loss stems from several sources. Community colleges have been criticized for often making little effort to ensure that their transfer courses indeed parallel university courses in credit hours, course sequencing, and prerequisites (Dougherty, 1996, p. 100).

Some NSCC courses in the business department have no direct equivalent at university; for example, Human Relations (BIT 2001) is not taught in the business programs of the local universities. This resulted in universities being unwilling to grant a credit for the course. The NSCC responded by changing the course title to Organizational Behaviour, which is recognized by most universities for credit. Essentially, Organizational Behaviour and Human Relations are the same course with only slight differences in content. The university indirectly is able to influence the selection of community college course titles.

It is worth noting that universities may further exercise their superiority over colleges when it comes to awarding credit to faculty of the NSCC wishing to teach at university. For example, Mount Saint Vincent University will credit a community college teacher with only three-quarters of a year of teaching for each year taught at a community college, while university teaching is credited on par among universities.

The Power of University and Employer Influence

The NSCC is in a subordinate position to both universities and to the business community. Both institutions are able to exert a great deal of indirect influence over the structure and operations of the Community College. The universities through the acceptance of transfer credits influence the curriculum of the College. More profoundly, the universities have the indirect discretion to legitimize programs of study as post secondary. If they choose not to accept credits and establish articulation agreements for student transfer they can indirectly impact the College. The NSCC is aware of the need to match course titles with university credits.

Employers possess an even greater sphere of influence, given that the vast majority of students are not planning to transfer to university.²³ The NSCC is placed in a position of being influenced to prepare students for current employer niche markets, when it would be better to be ahead of the current demand by providing broader education and preparing students for future markets. Brint and Karabel (1989) refer to this indirect influence of universities and employers on the community college curriculum as “structural power.”

The former Secretarial program, now the Office Information Technology program, is a low-end market niche served by the Community College. It is interesting that women heavily populate this program, over 90 percent. It is also the only business program that remained as a one-year program. The average salary is \$17,100 per year, \$1,000 below the level of the BIT program, which has a ratio of 45 percent to 55 percent male to female. The College is indirectly tracking this almost all female population in the Office Information Technology (OIT) program into the lowest paying business positions; however, it should be noted that OIT has a very high employment rate at 91 percent.

The difference between BIT and OIT is the greater emphasis on clerical employment skills in OIT, with typing, filing, and office practices being central to the OIT curriculum. The BIT and OIT students often compete for the same positions with OIT students finding traditional secretarial jobs and BIT students finding clerical/administrative jobs at the same level. Brint and Karabel (1989) challenge that the colleges have been praised for being democratic institutions that offer opportunity for students through employment programs, without considering that student employment opportunities may be restricted. A student

²³ Employers are able to influence the college curriculum through their demand for specific skills from graduates. The NSCC curriculum is developed through ‘Faculty Working Groups’ and ‘Industry Advisory committees’ working together to identify key competencies. The ‘Faculty Working Groups’ then decide on the learning outcomes to be demonstrated by students. The curriculum is often reduced to a commodity, as described by Franzak and Cowles (1993): “As a product, the curriculum is designed with the needs of at least two markets in mind: the students who select courses, and the employers who want students to come into the workplace equipped with knowledge and skills from courses.”

who enters the NSCC is not likely to transfer to university or to receive a position beyond the entry level. This finding is supported by the research of Brint and Karabel (1989), as follows:

They applauded the junior colleges for their efforts to provide useful training, and relatively few of them expressed concern that opportunities for students might thereby be narrowed (Brint and Karabel, 1989, p. 63).

For students who have limited financial resources and limited time the community college is the most viable option. For a community college student who may struggle through one or two years of lost income to earn an education; however, a four-year university degree may not be an option. This may be because of the need to support a family or because they cannot afford to live on social assistance or part-time wages for longer than one or two years.

Brint and Karabel (1989) while charging that community colleges track low-income students into jobs in markets that are too narrow in focus, accept that without this option many students would not have returned to take a second chance on an education.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, we wish to make our position clear: in the absence of community colleges, many highly motivated and able individuals – among them, workers, immigrants, minorities, and women – would have never entered, much less graduated from, an institution of higher learning (Brint and Karabel, 1989, p. 226).

Karabel (1977) does, however, believe that community colleges espouse open access and practice the perpetuation of class tracking. The NSCC is at the bottom of the hierarchy of postsecondary institutions preparing students for entry-level positions. The idea that this constitutes tracking as defined by Karabel (1977) is open to question. Many community college students that I interviewed had tried university and dropped out; did not have the grades required for university; could not afford or access a university education; were unemployed; or they were

employed in minimum wage service jobs. Therefore, one could argue that they are tracked by virtue of their socioeconomic status; however, without the community college they would not have the option of an education beyond high school, nor would they have the opportunity to acquire the education necessary for improved employment status. An inexpensive one-year certificate or a two-year diploma from a community college provides the education needed to start, albeit at the entry-level, on a new career. Grubb (1999) challenges Clark's (1960) contention that community college's cool-out many students. Grubb argues that most of these students, without community college, would not have participated in any post secondary education.

Student Voices and Motivations

The student voices showed a strong emphasis on how their economic needs were being met through the NSCC program and the accompanying potential career path. Students said that they needed to earn more than they were currently earning in jobs as waiters/waitresses or other service industry positions. They want to be comfortable and happy, and feel income is the key to these goals. They don't see university as an alternative, and most don't envision further education, which is represented in this student's words, as follows:

I finished high school a year ago, and I couldn't afford university. I picked up a calendar and thought, "why not try BIT?" I needed to get out of working as a cashier. I finished BIT and did OAIM. I want to get a job and earn some money (urban student).

In contrast to the career motivations of the 20 to 29 year-old students, the mature students, who may include single parents, have a much greater motivation to learn the specific skills of their occupation. Younger students are often not as focused and not sure of career goals. When students are told that a two-year program will lead to an increase in starting salary and a better job they are encouraged. The problem is that there is such an urgency to start work that they may not commit to an extra year. One applicant explained that she chose a four-month private trainer's program because it would take ten months to get the same learning at

NSCC. She, of course, was unaware that we were increasing the program to a two-year program. Her recommendation was that we shorten our program to four months. She was willing to incur the extra fees for the shortened time frame. She also explained that she had applied to a second level Computer Support and Management Support (CSMS) program and was given credit for her 4-month program as the equivalent of a one-year BIT program. The problem is that a one-year business program can easily be described exactly as a four-month program. When students are entering entry-level clerical positions the difference in learning may be negligible to an employer's needs. As we have seen, students often come with ill-defined notions of their academic and career path. Two responses to this lack of preparedness can be to help students meet program standards or to lower the demands placed on students through a less rigorous curriculum.

“Dumbing-Down” The Curriculum

The Public Relations (diploma) students in focus groups said that they had a need to go beyond training in basic competencies provided by BIT. These students couldn't see themselves in entry-level positions. One student, Melissa, accepted a clerical position after graduating from BIT, but left after she realized that she could earn more as a waitress. She wanted more income and a faster career path to management. The course content of the BIT program was designed to match entry-level clerical positions and as a result was not preparing students for managerial positions or for the advanced study required in diploma programs. Rhoads (1996) challenges that this narrow college curriculum leads to a fostering of docile students trained to perform fragmented tasks and not students who are critical thinkers.

Course content is broken down to match specific competencies that employers desire from their employees. Knowledge in the classroom is fragmented into pieces whereby students are judged on how well they master the individual parts. This decontextualization of learning corresponds to much of the work available in the local economy. A holistic view of work seems unnecessary because employees are expected to become proficient at

specific repeatable tasks. The idea that institutions would teach students to think critically about the tasks they are performing, as one would expect in Kincheloe's (1995) conceptualization of good work, seems absurd in the present workplace" (p. 76).

A Critical Curriculum

The NSCC curriculum development for the new Business Administration program for September 2001 would require a new theoretical and philosophical restructuring. To create writers and thinkers would require a critical multicultural perspective. Would the College be prepared to develop broader courses and general education and give up the specific industry focus that is entrenched in its social and political climate? As a publicly funded institution the NSCC is charged with meeting the economic needs of the Province of Nova Scotia. According to Rhoads (et al, 1996) students also demand a college education that focuses on career preparation. "Students insist that the courses they take ought to have direct relevance to their career goals" Rhoads (1996). Rhoads also says that most faculty prefer compliant students who do what they are told (1996, p. 76).

In fact, most faculty and staff are so caught up in careerism that students are rarely thought of in a holistic sense; instead, students are seen mostly as prospective workers and the other facets of their lives remain invisible (p. 77).

What Rhoads (1996) does not acknowledge is that employers require specific technical skills for specific times. This does not necessarily mean that a student who becomes an employee ceases to learn. It may be taking too finite a view of the transition from college to work. There are employee-training programs, and private programs offered through virtual, evening and university courses to name only a few options. In addition, there are faculty members who would contend that learning on-the-job is even more valuable. They argue that many of the broader skills are best learned in the workplace. It is often felt that "learning how to learn" is the most significant contribution of a community college education.

Rhoads and Valadez (1996) state that community colleges can do more to recognize and incorporate the student's experiences in the curriculum.

A critical multicultural perspective opens the possibility for lower and working-class students as well as culturally diverse students to share and build upon the stores of knowledge and abilities that they bring to campus by teachers who intentionally incorporate students' experiences into the pedagogical process (p. 80).

The role of a community college must be more than the enhancement of economic opportunity. The challenge, according to Rhoads, is to accept the culture that students bring with them, as described below:

The challenge for community colleges is to develop programs, courses, and pedagogical practices that offer diverse students opportunities to learn new ideas, concepts, and ways of seeing the world without rejecting the cultural forms these students bring with them (p.141).

Many students do not have the basic skills necessary for college success and "safety net" programs are needed. These courses further pronounce the difference between students who arrive with the needed cultural capital and those who possess only border knowledge. The following quote by Rhoads emphasizes how students who arrive without the necessary cultural capital are devalued.

Many remedial faculty believe that students should have learned these skills in high school and had them reinforced by parents, counselors, and peers. A number of remedial students, however, do not exhibit such competencies. The result is that some students lack essential knowledge for achieving success in the classroom. Students who lack the essential knowledge- cultural capital- are channeled to the developmental programs where they take specific courses designed to raise their level of understanding in specific knowledge areas (p. 145).

NSCC students often say they did not know which courses to select in high school and which college program to select for the careers they sought. High school

counselors were often outwardly opposed to community college or they were uninformed about the NSCC. Several students said that counselors recommended they not attend community college. The fact that many parents do not have college experience (and therefore may be of little help in advising their sons and daughters) makes the problem even more difficult.

First-Generation Students

First generation students do not have the family support to guide them in the questions they should ask. Parents who have not attended a post secondary institution may not understand the choices faced by their children.

First-generation college students from lower and working-class families are at a disadvantage to other students who call upon parents, relatives, or peers with experience in higher education as a source of information for making academic decisions (p.153).

The students that I interviewed relied on faculty and discussions with other students. One student said that she learned of a second year program by talking with students during daily smoke breaks.

Obviously, when students have access to knowledge through family or peers who have experience with higher education, it is to their benefit. Such students have available to them a form of cultural capital that lower- and working-class students do not typically have available to them.

Safety Nets or Streaming?

The NSCC has to be careful not to allow the placement testing to create a class of students who are identified by their lack of access to cultural capital. The College wants to reduce inequity and not promote it.

In theoretical terms, community colleges must find ways to embrace the border knowledge of culturally diverse students and at the same time provide learning opportunities for them to acquire necessary cultural capital (p.158).

Remedial, developmental or safety net courses, may label students as failures before they begin. The need to do safety net courses means that those already disadvantaged need to spend more time and money taking longer to complete their program of study. There is also the opportunity cost in lost earning time while they take longer to complete their studies. These students may carry heavy course loads when they are most likely those who have financial and social needs. They are also more likely to be older or single parents. Rhoads (1996) argues that programs must be in place to assist students without the burden of an additional time requirement.

Obviously, some type of educational program must exist to assist under-prepared college students. But such programs should not be full of disincentives... The challenge is to raise the level of understanding of students without requiring so many additional courses that an extra year or more is added to degree completion (p.161).

Career Education

It is obvious that community colleges are faced with challenges of serving a wide range of student needs. The most central organizing vision for NSCC is career education. The diversity of clients from those requiring access to advanced technology, to those interested in general education, means that there is often ambiguity about the mission of the college. It is not uncommon for faculty to challenge that the college serves many masters and is unclear of its strategic direction. "Multiple missions and multiple clients produce an organization where members often have an unclear sense of what the organization represents" (p.166). This vision has been made explicit with an emphasis on both career and quality of life. The college desires to create a sense of community and service around a connection to career education.

There is no question that the community college should serve the need of career education. I believe that community colleges do not need to sacrifice that goal for the goal of problem solving, and democratic education. Both goals can be met at the same time through the design of a curriculum that is less fragmented in its desire to teach employment skills and broader in its efforts to impart critical thinking and problem solving. Rhoads (1996) notes that a critical multicultural pedagogy would credit the cultural understanding and the border knowledge that students bring to the classroom.

Community colleges have long been known as democracy's college. While their open-door policies and blue-collar images have made them seem less elitist than their four-year counterparts, community colleges have failed in their promise to provide sound mobility to all students. Community colleges have certainly opened their doors to the masses, but to what result? Lower- and working-class students and minorities who enter the community college continue to march toward low-paying and working-class jobs, while middle- and upper- class students attending four-year institutions progress toward higher-level roles and more lucrative careers. (Rhoads, 1996p. 217).

Directional Indicators: the Way Forward

Retention

How do we address an attrition rate of 44 percent for the BIT students of the NSCC? The answer to this question is not easy, given that the College faces two competing and contradictory strategic missions in open access and excellence.

The first mission is identifying “at risk” students early in the program and determining the required supports will be a first step. The second mission is to investigate and develop the curriculum and “best practices” that will support “at risk” learners. “At risk” learners are not likely to be the most predisposed to independent and self-directed learning. They are not well served by virtual courses and independent lab classes. The same high correlation is found between

attrition rates and remedial courses. Students enrolled in stand-alone remedial courses experience higher rates of attrition than students enrolled in courses where the remedial component is integrated into the core course, according to Grubb (1996).

As one committee proposing multidisciplinary learning communities commented, the existing core curriculum “does not encourage students to explore the relations between the disciplines and transfer their learning from one course to another.” Indeed, most students have trouble with integrating and applying material from different disciplines, and there are particular reasons to think that community college students-whose prior academic records have often been weak, who may have been out of school for considerable periods of time, or who may be insecure about academic coursework-are likely to need substantial help with such integration (Grubb, 1996, p.23).

This practice of having a lead course integrated with a remedial course, called learning communities (LCs), is common among successful American community colleges. A LC involves the integration of several courses that are team delivered. For example, remedial math and business math may be integrated and taught together. A third course may even be included, such as accounting. The concept is to create themes and bring the courses together around applications. The clustering of the courses and faculty would be an exciting and rewarding challenge for both students and faculty. The process of clustering or “pairing” courses is becoming a practice at many American community colleges; the next quote is one example of how courses are paired.

The division of Academic Support provides paired courses so that students may receive assistance with reading and/or writing skills while they are concurrently enrolled in other courses. “Pairings” occur when sections of basic skills courses are linked to content-based courses that may be considered particularly challenging. Students in paired courses concurrently enroll in and attend both the basic skills and the content-based courses that are selected at complementary times (2001 – 2002, Heartland Community College, Illinois).

Developmental/Remedial Programming

One way to ensure student success is to better prepare students who enter the business program with poor skills in math, communications, and computers. The high attrition rate is usually attributed to failures in accounting, math, and computers. The problem faculty most often identify is the inability of students to read and interpret text material.

The NSCC established a post admission-testing program that was implemented in September 2001 to identify “at risk” students who are in need of support courses. It was stated that the negative term “remediation” would not be used in an effort to avoid stigmatizing labels. Another priority was that the courses in the core program retain the absolute standards that qualify them as post-secondary. A “dumbing-down” of the curriculum would not be an option.

Integrating Remedial Programs

The challenge that must be met is the need to incorporate the developmental courses within the core curriculum. The delivery needs to be integrated and seamless, as opposed to the more convenient, yet less effective, rules and workbook conventional style of delivery. In addition, as Grubb notes in the following quote, one must remember that adult students are quick to pick up the “real” meaning of alternative labels:

Once students are diagnosed as lacking competencies necessary for regular courses – or, to be more exact, once they fall below some score on a diagnostic test-then they are directed to courses labeled remedial or developmental. The “remedial” label implies that such courses remedy a lack of skills, and the pejorative connotations – blaming the students for their “deficiencies” – have caused many to avoid this term. The alternative label, “developmental,” stresses the further development of competencies that students bring to college, and avoids the negative implications of remediation (Goto, 1995). But what counts, after all, are the practices within the classrooms, and the

labels matter much less than the ways instructors approach their task” (Grubb, 1999, p.31).

The form, content, and the delivery method are all equally important to the successful implementation of developmental programming. Students in developmental/remedial courses will most likely not prefer a self-directed learning style. In fact, focus group comments from students indicated that one of the reasons they opted not to attend private colleges was the reputation of the private colleges for being primarily self-directed. Also, the rote *skills and drills* delivery method would not be the most effective with students in developmental programs. However, this is the most common approach used in most colleges to deliver remedial programs. Workbook exercises and self-directed computer aided instruction require highly self-motivated independent learners. Most of the students in need of developmental courses will be students who are taking a “second chance” at education; perhaps because their learning style did not match the skills approach they encountered in high school. The community college students I have taught are often in search of the “human touch” that is most available in a classroom taught by a caring instructor. In the following words Grubb (1999) describes the challenge of attempting to meet student needs through ad hoc remedial programs:

Too many of the instructors we observed were squarely in a skills-oriented tradition; there was nothing in their background or training, and no institutional support that could show them any other way to teach. And no matter how deftly individual instructors integrate remedial passages into their classes, ad hoc remediation can never be a comprehensive approach to the problems students bring to college, since it is often reactive, fleeting, tangential to the subject at hand, unsystematic” (Grubb, 1999, p.32).

Avoiding a “bits” Delivery

If the NSCC were to lend credence to Grubb’s research, a remedial program would not simply become an add-on, delivered by faculty with little or no

experience in the teaching of remedial courses. My recommendation would be to create a learning community and develop a practice and methodology that could be implemented through on-going faculty support. There is little doubt that the delivery of the proposed remedial program will be left to individual instructors and campuses. The format for the Communications will be consistent with the present grammar-based rules approach. The course will be delivered through the skills, “bits” approach most often used in junior high school, with questionable effectiveness. The remedial math may take the form of a junior high pre-algebra course based on a lecture and drill delivery method. The application to business occupations and competencies will be fleeting with this approach. Accordingly, the adult education model will be sacrificed for the sake of efficiency and conventional delivery. In the business program we do a great deal of “part-to-whole” delivery as we focus on conveying “bits” of information, such as grammar rules, mathematical operations, accounting formulas, and computer procedures. “Meaning-making approaches, by contrast, generally worry more about depth of understanding rather than coverage or efficiency” (Grubb, 1999, p. 34). This critical analysis is intended to make apparent a need to implement adult practices of education within the business curriculum. The College is guilty of an error of omission and not commission. The intention is to support student learning through post admission testing and the development of remedial courses. Unfortunately, the College has limited experience in the remediation area. It has been proposed that a business student take several remedial courses at the same time. The research by Grubb indicates that when a student does remedial work in one, two, or three areas the graduation rate declines from 28%, 16%, 9%, respectively.

In conventional remediation, students enter a college for academic and vocational purposes only to find themselves doing sentence completion exercises, arithmetic drills, and three-paragraph essays on contrived topics, and dropout rates from these courses are alarmingly high...” (Grubb, 1999, p. 35).

The solution is not to eliminate hidden remedial courses that would have always taken place informally. When faculty sees students who require developmental

work they incorporate it into their curriculum. Under-prepared community college students need support and developmental courses in math, communications, and computers. The practice in the Business Information Technology program was to provide disguised remediation in the first semester through the delivery of basic math and grammar skills in the Business Mathematics and Business Communications courses. Grubb (1999) recommends following the lead of colleges that have been successful in integrating remedial education into their programs. There is usually a lead course that the remedial course is connected with; and there is an occupational focus. These colleges also tend to schedule classes in pairs or triples. They keep class sizes small, and they commit resources to the delivery of the program. Grubb (1999) indicates that a collective, rather than an individual approach, is the route to successful programming.

The examples of learning communities, and the well-developed approach in the North County Community College, suggest that remedial/developmental education is especially likely to benefit from collective rather than individual approaches to instruction (Grubb, 1999, p. 205).

Finally, it will be important to assess the impact of a program that includes developmental courses. At the end of the first semester in December and at the end of the second semester in June students will be assessed against the post admission test to measure progress. The attrition rate will be closely monitored throughout the year to identify any changes. An objective would also include a comparison of teaching practices and attrition rates. The post admission test will identify the academic needs of students; however, it will not address the motivation of students.

Picking up the Pieces

The NSCC, along with the majority of community colleges in North America, is an open door college serving a diverse population. My research has revealed that lower socioeconomic status students are most often served: there are more minority and lower class students attending the NSCC. The high attrition rates

and lower success rates would, however, prove that the colleges do not serve an egalitarian role for the 44 percent who leave before graduating. “The student also moves through a funnel, with various persons and devices gradually narrowing his movement” (Clark, 1960, p.163).

The disparate graduation and transfer rates lead many critics to conclude that the community college has failed in its promise to provide social mobility for less privileged students (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Nora, 1993; Noa & Rendon, 1988; Olivas; 1979; Rendon, 1993; Rendon & Valadez, 1993; Velez, 1985 in Rhoads and Valadez, 1996).

One must recognize that university attrition rates are also high and students at both college and university often enter with a great deal of ambiguity. The focus groups I spoke to indicated that many did not know why they had chosen their program of study. One BIT student wanted to be a veterinarian. Two students saw the cosmetology program at the NSCC as their number one choice. One of the students, who aspired to take cosmetology at community college, was currently enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts at university. She was hoping to persuade her parents to let her take a one-year cosmetology course; however, her parents insisted that she remain at university. She felt that she could convince them to allow her to take a two-year diploma at the NSCC; however, a one-year certificate was not a possibility because of its low status with her parents. We must not lose sight of the role the college plays in “picking up the pieces” for those students who have had unsuccessful university experiences. Grubb (1999) calls for further research on how the community college culture impacts a student’s sense of identity.

What is needed is an analysis of how faculty and staff attitudes, beliefs, and values influence the decision making of students and how students at times offer resistance to organizational initiatives. What we are talking about is a closer examination of how the organizational culture of a community college gets translated to the student experience. More to the point, how does the culture influence a student’s sense of identity (p. 59)?

Student Advising

Many students indicated that they knew little about the program in which they were enrolled, and they knew less about second level programs. Finally, they wanted more information on graduate employment.

Improving student advising will positively impact students, and it should have an accompanying positive impact on retention rates. Assisting students in their efforts to clarify career and education choices is an obligation that we must accept. Research shows that students who have not declared a major area of concentration early in their college careers are more likely to leave before completing their program of study. Given that the majority of the new Business Administration students for September 2001 have indicated “No Concentration”²⁴ on their transcript, there is cause for concern. A proactive response would be to identify these students and offer faculty as advisors.

It is important to recognize that many business students are “experimenters,” who are unsure of “why” they have registered and what their course of study entails. Many enroll believing they are in an “IT” course. Of course, the question is, “Would they have enrolled if they knew it was not primarily a computer program? The immediate concern is that we have students who are confused about their decision to enroll and would benefit from faculty advice.

This faculty advice can take many formal and informal approaches. I recommend that we follow a more formal approach through the implementation of a career explorations course. The course would expose the student to more options and establish a strong relationship between the student and the College. The course would include information in the following areas: (1) career options, (2) graduate

²⁴ Upon completion of the first year of business administration, students must choose an area of concentration from Accounting, Marketing, Investment Management, Information Management, or choose

employment, (3) business courses and programs, (4) second year courses and programs, (5) other NSCC programs in diverse areas including trades, technologies, applied arts, health services, etc., (6) university options and transfer of credits (i.e. articulation agreements), (7) professional associations, (8) virtual course and program options, (9) extension programs and courses. This would represent a move toward establishing a relationship that recognizes the student as a life-long learner with diverse interests.

Shaw (2000) supports the belief that the preparation of students for employment in entry-level positions must be expanded to allow students the opportunity to achieve broader goals.

Rather, the challenge is to assist students to set their goals higher than what they think they should be, to broaden the array of career choices, to foster intellectualism and critical thinking, and to institute changes in the curriculum and pedagogical practices that are important for democratizing college classrooms (Shaw et al, 2000, p. 202).

The many students who graduate from the business program at the NSCC and go on to achieve success in diverse areas are testament to the ability of students to achieve beyond entry-level positions. Charlie who became a medical doctor after struggling to support a family on government assistance is just one example of the possibility of meeting economic goals through a community college education. Another example of success is Chris, who prior to graduating from BIT in June 2001, secured a position earning \$34,000 per year as a junior accountant. While the majority of students graduate and take entry-level positions in business, it is important to broaden our thinking about the potential of students. The new two-year Business Administration program will see students graduate with enhanced skills for employment. It is important that these students be provided with an education that will allow them to continue to learn and to achieve their goals.

“No Concentration.” “No Concentration” means that the student chooses among a very limited choice of electives.

Maintaining a “High Touch” Admissions Process

Prior to March 2001, all students who applied to one or more of the thirteen campuses of the NSCC could expect that their application would be processed at a local campus. After March 2001 the NSCC sought to standardize the admission process by establishing a central admissions office located at the Halifax campus. The advantage would come from the standardization of processes and the resulting efficiency that comes from a lack of duplication. An overall goal was to ensure that all students were treated to the same fair and equitable process of admission, which the College felt was not the case under a system of individual campus admissions. The disadvantage would come from the lack of personal service and convenient access to faculty, counselors, and admissions officers that were provided by the local campus; instead, students would be given a toll free phone number. The impact on the students of the new central admissions process is difficult to assess because the NSCC did not undertake a formal review and evaluation; particularly from the vantage point of the applicants/potential students. Research by Tinto (2000) indicates that a change in educational mission, particularly in an area as crucial as admissions would impact student retention, as follows:

In moving toward a policy on student retention, institutions must first decide the character of their educational mission. More often than not, that will require of the institution a realization that it cannot hope or even wish to serve all possible students who might apply for admission...What this requires of institutions is a new way of thinking about the character of admissions and its role in the process of student retention, one that puts admission at the very core of institutional efforts to educate and retain the individuals they recruit (Tinto, 1987, p.183).

Eleven of the thirteen campuses of the NSCC are commuter institutions that do not have residences. As a result, most of the campuses, including the two with residences, draw upon a student population that lives close to the campus that they attend. Prior to March 2001 a student would likely have visited the campus to speak with someone about his or her application. The large central office

admissions process is antithetical to the vision of the NSCC “to meet students where they are” (NSCC Vision Statement, 2001). The impersonal, bureaucratic process of admission breaks the link between the campus and its local community, which Tinto (1987) argues is at the core of an educational institution’s ability to serve its stakeholders, as follows:

An institution’s capacity to retain students is directly related to its ability to reach out and make contact with students and integrate them into the intellectual fabric and institutional life. It hinges on the establishment of a healthy, caring environment that enables individuals to find a niche in the social and intellectual communities of the institution (Tinto, 1987, p.181).

The first admission hurdle is for the student to submit his or her application to the central office in Halifax and gain acceptance to one of the campuses of the NSCC. The next hurdle is a mandatory battery of three two-hour placement tests to determine the student’s proficiency in math, communications, and computers to determine if the student has what it takes to succeed at the NSCC.

Areas for Further Research

Attrition and Teaching Methodology

For students who fail to complete their studies and graduate, the criticism of community colleges “cooling out” student ambitions is a reality (Clark, 1960). The impact that teaching, the program, and the College have on attrition requires further research within a social, political, and economic context. For the large number of students who are experimenting and leave after discovering that the program is not for them, has the College been successful in helping them make career choices? Do most students leave the program because it was not the right fit, and not because of their inability?

How do the method of program delivery and the style of teaching impact attrition? Most business courses lend themselves most readily to lecture style

delivery and direct transfer of information. Research by Grubb (1999) and Fisk (1983) conclude that a great deal of college teaching is reduced to “skills and drills,” referred to as “biting,” breaking material into small “bits,” which is contrasted with “texting,” where students read and interpret larger bodies of information.

We sometimes call this dominant approach “skills and drills” because of its basic impulse to break complex practices (reading and writing, for example, or mathematical formulation and problem solving) into component skills and then to drill on these sub skills (Grubb and Kalman, 1994). Others have similarly labeled this the “skills approach,” “drill and kill” to simplify the tedium of rote memorization and drill (Grubb, 1999 p. 28).

The NSCC has been progressive in instituting a College driven teacher education program that aims to promote innovative teaching practices. The program is mandatory for all new faculty who attend teacher professional development over two summers. In addition, new faculty members are assigned an experienced mentor who observes the new instructor’s teaching and provides coaching.

The quality of teaching might also matter particularly to the academically under prepared students concentrated in community colleges. As we will see, many instructors and administrators feel that conventional didactic instruction is particularly inappropriate for nontraditional students, and they are searching for more participatory methods to motivate them (Grubb, 1999 p.12).

The College recognizes the importance of a learner-centered andragogy; however, challenges exist in two areas; first, heavy teaching loads and large numbers of students are common; second, there is a deficiency in availability of professional development for existing, experienced faculty (It must be kept in mind that the NSCC has only existed for 13 years). Furthermore, teaching is an isolating activity and there is little opportunity for collegial contact and dialogue on teaching practices. Even among teachers in departments who might be teaching the same subjects there is little chance for dialogue. It is not unusual for two or

three teachers in the same business department to teach the same subject with minimal contact.

The Limits of a Didactic Approach

The didactic approach to teaching has also been called the “factory model” or “industrial mode,” since it treats students as “raw material” to be “processed” by teachers into a “finished product” (Grubb, 1999, p.44).

Given the business student’s goals are so multifaceted; it is difficult to categorize their purposes beyond employment goals. It is, however, important to undertake research on community college student’s motivation and learning style. “Many instructors recommend that courses incorporate goals related to the needs of students, particularly (in community colleges) their progress toward employment” (Grubb 1999, p 40). Students need to learn the concepts of the discipline/subject being studied. They also need to be motivated through teaching to explore content on their own and reach personal interpretations.

There are, of course, many other conceptions of good teaching. Almost every book on adult education and on postsecondary teaching contains recommendations, usually drawn from the experience of veteran educators. A widely read example in higher education is the following list:

seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education” (Chickering and Gamson, 1991): good teaching (1) encourages faculty-student contact; (2) encourages cooperation among students; (3) encourages active learning; (4) gives prompt feedback; (5) emphasizes time on task; communicates high expectations; and (7) respects diverse talents and ways of learning” (Grubb, 1999, p. 43).

Given that there is no process at NSCC, or at most community colleges, to assess teaching that extends beyond student course evaluations or to create dialogue about teaching, it is difficult to monitor and improve practice.

The isolation of most community college instructors inhibits the interaction with their peers that might provide them with new ideas about teaching, suggestions about teaching problems, and support for their experiments (Grubb, 1999, p. 49).

Business departments on the twelve campuses of the NSCC are small with most subject areas having only one or two teachers. The heavy workloads and large numbers of students all contribute to a tendency toward isolation. Rural campuses where the student numbers are smaller will have greater collegiality and more team teaching practices. Urban campuses have a much heavier teaching load and tend to be more isolating for faculty.

Teaching in an occupational area requires the need to balance the outcomes sought by employers on one end, and by students on the other end; hopefully, both outcomes are the same. A range of teaching methods is needed to deliver the theory and application combined with workplace skills and competencies. A hands-on class, such as individual computer instruction may appear to be innovative, and yet be didactic and passive.

Recommendations for Change and Further Research

1. Conduct research on the development and implementation of a career exploration course to address the needs of all Business Information Technology and Business Administration students, especially those who are “experimenters.” The course would include information on the current Business Administration program; second year options; other NSCC programs; extension and virtual courses; university credit. Special attention would be devoted to career exploration and graduate employment. We need to assist our students in becoming well-informed decision-makers in the areas of post-secondary education and employment.

Research on community colleges or other post secondary institutions that are currently developing or using career development courses would be essential to determine if this is a successful course of action.

2. It is important to move as many students as possible from the “No Concentration” selection, which represents 48 percent of the 2001 applicants for the new Business Administration program, to a focused area of study. Research shows that the longer a student takes to declare a major the more likely he or she is to leave before completing their program of studies (Grubb, 1996). A word of caution is that forcing students to make a selection without understanding their motivations and goals is unlikely to improve retention.
3. Integrate developmental courses into the core curriculum, rather than as stand-alone remedial courses. Remedial/developmental components are best delivered through learning communities (LCs) of courses where several courses are team delivered with remedial components included. Communications, math, and computers can be successfully implemented across the business curriculum through the development of LCs. The goal is not to resort to a “skills and drills” didactic delivery of remedial programming. It is recommended that a specialist in remedial delivery be located to develop the necessary supports and monitor implementation. It would be important to locate community colleges that are delivering their courses through a LC model or a similar approach. This would provide the opportunity to conduct research through both theory and observation of implementation and practice.
4. Develop a policy that prevents “tracking” within the College. One area of immediate concern is the requirement for a university degree for admission to an Advanced Diploma. An Advanced Diploma should not be exclusive to those who hold a university degree. A Nova Scotia Community College student with a two-year Business Administration diploma should receive equal consideration with university applicants for admission.

In conclusion, this research revealed the following: (1) Preparation for employment is the most significant reason for attending the business program; (2) Graduates of one-year diploma programs do not fair much better than high school graduates in terms of starting salaries; (3) Graduates of diploma programs do earn better incomes than high school graduates; however, the salary is still substantially below that of university graduates; (4) Location and fees are important factors in a student's decision to attend a particular campus; (5) Students will not migrate to another campus to take a second level specialty; (6) The largest target market is 20 – 29; (5) Approximately 50 percent of the students can be identified as “experimenters,” who are unsure of why they have selected the program. (7) Many students are taking a “second chance” on education and have weak foundations in the basics of math and communications. This group requires extensive remedial support, which should be in the form of high contact, rather than computer or workbook tutorials.

Finally, the examination of whether the NSCC through its business programs serves to provide students with career opportunities that permit them to move out of lower SES groups, or whether student ambitions are “cooled-out” as they are tracked into low paying clerical positions requires further research. One of the conclusions reached in this research is that the attrition rate of 44 percent in the Business Information Technology program is an institutional failure. The high attrition rate serves to “cool out” the education and career goals of almost half of all students who enroll in business programs. Retention policies that include testing and remedial programming have not reduced the attrition rate for students from lower socioeconomic groups and for students who are less well prepared for post secondary study. For many students, the Nova Scotia Community College through its business programs is not serving the democratic and egalitarian role of providing students with the opportunity to rise above lower socioeconomic status.

For those students who are taking a “second chance” and “experimenting” (who do not fall victim to attrition) the NSCC provides an opportunity for post secondary education that would not have existed otherwise. Further research is required to determine why community college students feel the need to stop out or take a more indirect route to a post secondary education, when so many of their counterparts go directly from high school to university.

Further research is required to determine what percent of university students would also be experimenters? The difference between a university experimenter and a community college experimenter may be based on income. There is a group of students, as identified in the focus groups, who selected community college because of the low fees. There is another group who opted for NSCC because they are taking a second chance on a post secondary education, after having had an unsuccessful university experience. This group is searching for a low-cost, short duration program with potential for immediate employment upon graduation.

Additional research is required to determine whether experimentation at community college is a process of social class streaming based on income. University would be on the higher end of the hierarchy of post secondary institutions and considered to be the best choice, even for students who are experimenting, when they can afford it. The circumstances may change in the case of “second chancers”; particularly, when a student has already unsuccessfully experimented with university, community college becomes a more economical option; sometimes it is the only option when a student has not acquired sufficient credits to remain in a university program. For “experimenters” and “second chancers” community college may be the only viable route to a post secondary education. For those students with limited financial resources who cannot afford the potential risk of wasting a year of university fees, the community college provides a practical education for employment, in addition to

university transferable credits at a fee that is one-third to one-fourth the rate of university fee.

With a community college education the student is not likely to be faced with the need to accept a low-level “McDonalds” job. An entry-level clerical position, for example, provides a foundation; particularly when combined with college credits. Through a community college education, the student may take a low paying (\$17,000 to \$24,000), entry-level position to gain practical work experience and may use the college credits to enroll in further post secondary studies at a later date to earn the credentials needed for promotion.

A four-year degree is not an option for some students, and without a community college education there is no opportunity for further post secondary study. Some students, represented by the focus group student who wanted to change her career from being a waitress to a business position, are in search of more meaningful work. A recent report by the Halifax Regional Development Corporation recognized that the greatest growth in employment was to be found among community college graduates. Further research is needed to address the question of the meaningfulness and the accompanying quality of the employment a graduate finds; however, the community college does provide a path to employment for many students who would have no other option.

Conclusion

The lives of NSCC students are found to be much more complex than the description provided in the literature. The macro-level quantitative research of Jerome Karabel and Burton Clarke, as the critics of community college education, fails to account for the multi-layered lives of students. Norton Grubb’s research, on the other hand, comes closest to identifying the need to understand the community college through site-specific qualitative research.

This thesis delves deeper, than previous research, into the nuances of experiences of community college students and presents the outcomes through a prism at the micro-level of business programs. This depth of investigation revealed that it is the student's perception of his or her community college educational experience and path toward accomplishing occupational goals that matter most in assessing whether community college provides an opportunity for mobility. When the student is successful and perceives that there is opportunity to move from a service position to a white-collar tertiary position, then mobility has taken place. The student has successfully reframed his or her self-image and has a new vision of future educational and occupational opportunity. The student has experienced a transformational pedagogy that has contributed to the development of emotional capital through an increase in personal self-efficacy and reframing of the future. This change can only occur if there is a demand in the labour market for better qualified students and community colleges provide the education to meet that demand.

For the students in the focus groups who expressed the importance of moving from service jobs where the hours of work prevented them from taking care of their children, the community college was a conduit of mobility. These students may not significantly increase their income; however, they gain control over their lives. For students on social assistance or in positions where they have little autonomy this change is a vital first step. A community college education puts back on track the lives of students who have been derailed in their pursuit of post secondary education. Students find a safe-haven for experimentation and the opportunity for a second chance at post secondary education. The community college's multicultural approach to meeting the diverse needs of students creates the social capital that is a prerequisite of emotional capital and a successful learning experience.

Attrition will, unfortunately, be a result of the community college's open access policy. The many under-prepared and previously unsuccessful students who are

taking a second chance at PSE will bring the demands of their complex lives with them. The many competing demands will mean that attrition will be a constant part of community college education.

The community college is best positioned in the post secondary hierarchy to make a contribution to the lives of working-class students. These are students who would likely have had no other opportunity to obtain a PSE without the existence of the community college. This goal is best achieved through a curriculum that goes beyond the presentation of skills to create docile employees for niche markets. As long as the community college remains an institution starved of funding and structurally positioned in a subservient role to university and industry it will flounder in its efforts to identify its mission. The community college must avoid replicating the course delivery of universities, so preparing students to become obedient employees of the Fordist economy (the cheap supply of semi-skilled labour) rather than the empowered critical problem solvers of the post modern economy.

The community college is best positioned as an innovative teaching institution. It will require additional resources devoted to the promotion of risk taking and experimentation in program delivery to allow the community college to serve the diverse needs of the student population.

This goal requires a new vision of the community college that anticipates the needs of its future democratic citizenry and plays a critical role in creating upward mobility. The need to prepare students for employment can not be devalued or over-looked as a worth-while goal of community college education; however, the quality of the employment should be subject to careful examination.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Focus Group # 1: Accepted but did not attend (ADA)

1. Think back to the time when you were preparing your application to attend the Business Information Technology program at the Nova Scotia Community College...

How much did you know about the Nova Scotia Community College? The Campus? The Business Information Technology Program? Write what you knew about each in the appropriate box below:

A form will be distributed for participants to write their responses

The College		
The Campus		
The Program		

Prompts: You may consider...

- Fees, application procedure, courses
- College, campus, program reputation

2. Once again, reflect on the time when you were making your decision to apply to the campus...

Describe the process that you followed.

Prompts:

- What steps did you take?
- What information did you obtain?
- Whom did you speak with about your decision?

3. What happened to make you decide not to attend?

Prompts:

- What did you decide to do rather than attend this program?
- What were the events, situations, reasons that you can identify for not attending?

4. When you were applying to the BIT program, what were your career goals?

Prompts:

- Where did this career information come from?
- What career exploration did you do?

5. Once again, think back to when you were making your decision to apply to study business,

What were your choices? List your options with *the reasons for and against* for each one.

Prompts:

- What programs did you consider?
 - What institutions did you consider?
 - What other options did you explore, such as work or travel?
6. Think about who may have influenced you positively or negatively in reaching your decision...
- Prompts:**
- How did they influence you?
 - What did they say?

7. All things considered, what would you say is the most significant reason for not attending the business program at the Nova Scotia Community College?

Prompts:

Moderator will first provide a five-minute summary

8. Is there anything that we missed?

Prompts:

Allow ten minutes for final discussion.

Appendix 2

Focus Group # 2: Current Second Year Students (CSYS)

1. Think back to the time when you were making your decision to enroll in this program...

Describe the process you followed to reach your final decision to attend this program?

Prompts:

- What steps did you follow?
- Prepare a time-line of your steps using the following handout.
The handout will give each participant something to focus on as they reflect. It will generate more equal and open participation at the start of the process.

2. Think about who may have influenced you positively or negatively in reaching your decision...

Prompts:

- How did they influence you?
- What did they say?

3. Write down what you knew about the program before you enrolled.

Prompts:

- How did you use this information?
- Where did the information come from?
Use the handout provided to list what you knew prior to enrolling, not what you now know.

4. What were your goals?

Prompts:

- How did your choice of programs serve your goals?
If participation is not taking place with all participants sharing, this question will be asked first as a "write-down" question, followed by an around the table sharing.

5. When you applied to BIT, what was your career goal?

Prompts:

- Have your career goals changed?
- How did you decide that the current program would help you achieve your goals?
- When you first enrolled in BIT, had you already planned on continuing your studies in a second level diploma program?

6. What other educational options did you consider?

Prompts:

- Ask participants to make a list of their options for study only.
- Ask participants to complete the grid that will be handed out.

7. All things considered, what would you say is the most significant reason for attending the second year program in which you are enrolled?

Prompt:

- A five-minute summary of the key points will be provided.
8. If you were to describe your current program of study as an animal, what would it be?
- Prompt**
- Explain how the characteristics and attributes of your animal are like your program?
9. Is there anything that we may have missed?

Prompt:

- Allow ten minutes for final discussion.

Appendix 3

Focus Group # 3: Current Business Students Who have Registered for a Second Year Program (CBS/RSY)

1. What factors were most important in reaching your decision to register for the second year program?

Prompts:

- Write your points on the sheet that is being handed out.

2. What other options did you consider?

Prompts

- Make a list of the programs you considered
- If you applied for jobs, provide details

3. How much do you know about the program that you are registered for?

Prompts:

- Can you list the courses?
- Do you know about job prospects upon graduation?
- Are there any special requirements?

4. When did you reach your decision to register in the second year program?

Prompts:

- Did you know before you enrolled in the one-year business program?
- Was there a time period during the year when you reached the decision?

5. How would you describe the decision making process you followed prior to registering for the second year program?

Prompts:

- Describe the conversations with students, faculty, and campus staff.
- Describe the conversations with family members.

6. Who encouraged form or discouraged you from registering in the second year program?

Prompts:

- What was said to you that influenced your decision?

7. What was the most important source of information? How was it influential?

Prompts:

- How did you use campus promotional materials?
- What role did faculty presentations or discussions play?

8. All things considered, what would you say is the most significant reason for deciding to register in the second year program?

Prompts:

- Moderator will provide a five-minute summary.

9. If you were to describe the BIT program as an animal, what would it be and why?

Prompts:

- Explain how the characteristics and attributes of your animal reflect the program.

10. Is there anything that we missed?

Prompts:

- Allow ten minutes for final discussion.

Appendix 4

Focus Group # 4: Current Business Students Not Registering For a second Year Program

1. What do you plan to do after graduation?
Prompts:
 - Do you plan to look for work?
 - Do you plan to continue study?
 - Do you have other plans?
2. How did you reach this decision?
Prompts:
 - What are your reasons for your choice?
3. What career do you see yourself in next year? Three years? Five years?
4. What information did you receive on the second year programs?
Prompts:
 - Take a moment to list what you know about the second year options.
 - What programs are available?
 - Did you consider going on to second year?
5. What are your reasons for choosing not to enroll in a second year option?
Prompts:
 - Give your reasons in order of priority.
6. Under what conditions would you consider enrolling in a second year program?
Prompts:
 - What would need to change for you to enroll?
7. Would you consider enrolling in a second year program at a future date?
Prompts:
 - What would make this future date more desirable?
 - What would you say is the reason that you would not register?
8. What plans do you have for future learning?
 - How could the NSCC be a part of these plans?
9. All things considered, what was the main reason for deciding not to continue your studies by registering in a second year program?
Prompts:
 - Moderator will provide a five-minute summary.
10. If you were to describe the BIT program as an animal, what would it be and why?
Prompts:

- How would the characteristics and attributes of the animal describe the program?

11. Is there anything that we missed?

Prompts:

- Allow ten minutes for a final discussion.

Appendix 5

Accepted did not Attend: Survey (10 minutes)

Purpose: By participating in this survey you will be helping us create a profile of our Business Students. Please be assured that the survey is confidential, and you will remain anonymous.

Instructions: Place an "X" in the brackets to indicate your choice

1. What was the highest level of education you successfully completed before September 2000?
 1. Grade 11 or below ()
 2. Grade 12 ()
 3. General Equivalency Diploma 12/GED12 ()
 4. Some Community College ()
(program: _____)
 5. Completed Community College ()
(Program: _____)
 6. Some private training or career college ()
 7. Completed private training/career school ()
 8. Some university ()
 9. Undergraduate university degree or certificate ()
 10. Graduate university degree ()
 11. Other ()
specify: _____)

2. During the twelve months before you applied to the Community College, what was your major activity - what occupied your time for most of the year?
 12. going to high school ()
 13. going to community college, university, or other post-secondary institution ()
 14. working ()
 15. education and work ()
 16. household/personal responsibilities ()
 17. illness ()
 18. seeking employment ()
 19. other
()specify _____)

3. Before you applied to the College, did you ever work at a full-time job (more than 30 hours per week)?
 20. Yes ()
 21. No ()

4. Altogether, how many months or years of full-time work experience did you have before applying to the campus?
 22. () Months
 23. () Years

5. Use the following 5-point scale (1 means not at all important, and 5 means very important, with 2,3,4 representing degrees of importance in between) to answer the following questions. Thinking back to prior to September, 2000 when you were gathering information and deciding what program of study you would pursue, how important was it that the program...

		not at all important				very important
24.	could be completed in one year?	1	2	3	4	5
25.	credits could be transferred to university?	1	2	3	4	5
26.	provided general learning?	1	2	3	4	5
27.	prepared you for another program at the NSCC?	1	2	3	4	5
28.	included a work-experience term?	1	2	3	4	5
29.	provided specific skills for employment?	1	2	3	4	5

6. Using the same scale (1 means not at all important and 5 means very important), think about when

you first enrolled in the program...how important were the following to you?		not at all important					very
	important						
30.	acquiring the skills needed for a particular job	1	2	3	4	5	
31.	improving yourself, generally	1	2	3	4	5	
32.	improving your chances of a good income	1	2	3	4	5	
33.	preparing for advanced study	1	2	3	4	5	

7. What careers do you see as your options after graduation from your current program of study (list the potential jobs you feel that you would be qualified for?

34. _____

35. _____

36. _____

37. _____

38. _____

8. What are your starting salary expectations (hourly wages)?

39. \$5.50 to \$8.50 ()

40. \$8.51 to \$11.50 ()

41. \$11.51 to \$14.50 ()

42. over \$14.51 ()

9. Prior to registering in your current program, what other options did you consider?

43. university ()

44. private college ()

45. another NSCC program ()

46. work ()

47. other (specify _____)

10. Was the program you are registered in your first choice?

48. Yes ()

49. No (), what was your first choice? _____

50. Why were you not able to take the first choice? _____

11. Did you apply to any other educational institutions?
51 No ()
52 Yes, () which ones:
()

12. What source of information was most significant in your decision to enroll in your current?
program at the NSCC?
53 high school counselor ()
54 family member advice
55 information from friends ()
56 information from the institution ()
57 other ()
(Specify:)

14. Why did you choose a program of study other than the Community College?

_____)

For background purposes...

15. What is the highest level of education completed by your father or male guardian?
58 ()

16. What is the highest level of education completed by your mother or female guardian?
59 ()

17. What was/is your father's or male guardian's occupation?
60 ()

18. What was/is your mother's or male guardian's occupation?
61 ()

19. Are you the first in your immediate family to attend community college?
62 yes ()
63 no ()

20. Are you the first in your immediate family to attend any post-secondary institution (beyond high school)?
64 yes ()
65 no ()

21. What is your gender?
66 male ()
67 female ()

22. What is your age?

68 age: ()

23. What is your marital status?

69 single ()

70 married or common law ()

71 separated or divorced ()

72 widow or widower ()

24. Do you have children financially dependent on you?

73 yes ()

74 no ()

25. Are you employed while studying at the campus?

75 yes () How many hours do you work each week? () hours).

76 no ()

Appendix 6

Business Student Survey

Purpose: By participating in this survey you will be providing information that will allow the NSCC to continue to meet the educational needs of students. This survey will be used to generate an overall picture of the Business Student. The information and the profile created will be used to conduct focus group interviews, which will provide a more detailed understanding of our students. Please be assured that you will remain anonymous.

Instructions: Place an "X" in the brackets to indicate your choice

1. Are you:
01 Full-time? ()
02 Part-time? ()
2. What were your reasons for taking the program part-time?
03 Have a full-time job ()
04 Have a part-time job ()
05 Need to complete credits from a previous semester or year ()
06 Lack of money ()
07 Family responsibilities ()
08 Health reasons ()
09 Other
(specify: _____)
3. What was the highest level of education you successfully completed before attending this campus?
10 Grade 11 or below ()
11 Grade 12 ()
12 General Equivalency Diploma 12/GED12 ()
13 Some Community College
(program _____)
14 Completed Community College
(Program: _____)
15 Some private training or career college ()
16 Completed private training/career school
17 Some university ()
18 Undergraduate university degree or certificate ()
19 Graduate university degree ()
20 Other (Please
specify: _____)
4. During the twelve months before you enrolled in your program, what was your major activity – what occupied your time for most of the year?
21 going to high school ()
22 going to community college, university, or other post-secondary institution ()
23 working ()
24 school and work ()
25 household/personal responsibilities ()
26 illness ()
27 other
(specify: _____)

5. Before you enrolled at the campus, did you ever work at a full-time job (more than 30 hours per week)?

28 Yes ()

29 No ()

6. Altogether, how many months or years of full-time work experience did you have before enrolling at the campus?

30 Months ()

31 Years ()

7. During the twelve months before you enrolled in your program, where did you reside?

32 Annapolis County ()

33 Antigonish County ()

34 Cape Breton County ()

35 Colchester County ()

36 Cumberland County ()

37 Digby County ()

38 Guysborough County ()

39 Halifax County ()

40 Hants County ()

41 Inverness County ()

42 Kings County ()

43 Lunenburg County ()

44 Pictou County ()

45 Queens Ccounty ()

46 Richmond County ()

47 Shelburne County ()

48 Victoria County ()

49 Yarmouth County ()

50 Outside Nova Scotia ()

51 Outside Canada (foreign student) ()

8. Use the following 5-point scale (1 means not at all important, and 5 means very important, with 2,3,4 representing degrees of importance in between) to answer the following question. Thinking back to prior to September, 2000 when you were gathering information and deciding what program of study you would pursue, how important was it that the program...

52 could be completed in one year? ()

53 credits could be transferred to university? ()

54 provided general learning? ()

55 prepared you for a second level program at the NSCC? ()

56 included a work-experience term? ()

57 provided specific skills for employment? ()

9. using the same scale (1 means not all important and 5 means very important), think about when

you first enrolled in the program...how important were the following to you?

58 acquiring the skills needed for a particular job ()

59 improving yourself, generally ()

60 improving your chances of a good income ()

61 preparing for advanced study ()

10. Did you relocate in the past twelve months so that you could attend the campus?

62 Yes ()

63 No()

11. What would you say is the main reason for choosing to enroll in the Business Information
64 Technology program?
(_____)

12. What careers do you see as your options after graduation (list the potential jobs you feel
that you would be qualified for?

65 _____
66 _____
67 _____
68 _____
69 _____

13. What are your starting salary expectations (hourly wages)?

70 \$5.50 to \$8.50 (____)
71 \$8.51 to \$11.50 (____)
72 \$11.51 to \$14.50 (____)
73 over \$14.51 (____)

14. Using the following five point scale (1 = poorly prepared, and 5 = very well prepared)
answer the

following question: how well prepared were you for your program of studies? (circle one
number)

74. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

15. Using the same scale, rate how prepared you were for your current program of studies
(a) based on your previous math skills

1 = poorly prepared, and 5 = well prepared

75 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

(b) based on your previous communications skills

76 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

77 (c) based on your previous computer skills

1, 2, 3, 4, 5

16. Did you successfully complete all of the first semester courses (earn a grade of 60 or
greater)?

78 Yes (____)

79 No (____)

80 If you answered "No," which course(s) did you not pass?

(_____)

81 Why do you feel you were not successful? (please explain...
_____)

17. What was your grade average for the first semester?

82 under 50 (____)

- 83 50 to 59 ()
84 60 to 69 ()
85 70 to 79 ()
86 80 to 89 ()
87 90 to 99 ()

18. How is the pace of the program?

- 88 too slow ()
89 the right pace ()
90 too fast ()

19. Based on the first semester, was the program a good choice? (Did it meet your expectations?)

- 91 Yes ()
92 No, Why not? ()
20. Prior to registering in this program, what other options did you consider?
93 university ()
94 private college ()
95 another NSCC program ()
96 work ()
97 other (specify) ()

21. Was this program your first choice?

- 98 Yes ()
99 No (), what was your first choice?
()
100 Why were you not able to take the first choice?
()

22. Did you apply to any other educational institutions?

- 101 No ()
102 Yes, which ones:
()

23. What do you plan to do next September?

- 103 enroll in a second level business program at NSCC ()
104 work full-time ()
105 work part-time ()
106 attend university ()
107 enroll in another NSCC program (not business) ()
108 attend another educational institution ()
(specify:)

24. How did you decide on attending the NSCC to enroll in the business program?

- 109 high school counselor ()
110 family member advice ()
111 information from friends ()
112 information from the college ()
113 advertisements ()
114 other ()
(Specify:)

25. Why did you choose BIT over OIT?

115

(specify: _____)

In the next series of questions, please use a 5-point scale to indicate your level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with different aspects of your community college education. On this scale, a "1" would indicate that you were dissatisfied with something, while a "5" would indicate that you were very satisfied. Points 2, 3, 4 indicate degrees in between. Write the number you select between 1 and 5 in the brackets.

26. Looking back on the first semester, and using the 5-point scale...were you dissatisfied (1) or very satisfied (5).

116 that your program of study is worth the financial investment ()

117 that your program was worth the personal investment of time required for classes and study ()

27. Over the first semester how dissatisfied (1) or very satisfied (5) were you with the following:

118 the computer labs ()

119 class sizes ()

120 availability of faculty ()

121 the overall quality of teaching ()

For background purposes...

28. What is the highest level of education completed by your father or male legal guardian?

122 ()

29. What is the highest level of education completed by your mother or female legal guardian?

123 ()

30. Are you the first in your family to attend community college?

124 yes ()

125 no ()

31. Are you the first in your family to attend any post-secondary institution (beyond high school)?

126 yes ()

127 no ()

32. What is your gender?

128 male ()

129 female ()

33. What is your age?

130 age: ()

34. What is your marital status?

131 Single

132 married or common law ()

133 separated or divorced ()

134 widow or widower ()

35. Do you have children financially dependent on you?

135 Yes ☐

136 No ☐

36. Are you employed while studying at the campus?

137 Yes ☐

138 No ☐

37. If you answered "Yes," to the question above, how many hours do you work?

139 ()

38. How are you financing your education?

140 personally, through part-time work during the year ☐

141 personally, through savings or summer employment ☐

142 parents or spouse ☐

143 student loans ☐

144 scholarships or bursaries ☐

145 assistance program ☐

146 other ()

Thank you for completing the survey!

Appendix 7

Second Year Business Student Survey (10 minutes)

Purpose: By participating in this survey you will be helping us create a profile of our Business Students. Please be assured that the survey is confidential, and you will remain anonymous.

Instructions: Place an "X" in the brackets to indicate your choice

1. What do you plan to do next September?
 - 1 work full-time ()
 - 2 work part-time ()
 - 3 attend university ()
 - 4 enroll in another NSCC program ()
 - 5 attend another educational institution ()(specify: _____)
 2. What were you doing last year, prior to September, 2000 when you enrolled in your current program?
 - 6 Business Information Technology ()
 - 7 Office Information Technology ()
 - 8 Another NSCC program ()Specify: _____
 - 9 Attending another educational program () Specify: _____
 - 10 Working ()
 3. What was the highest level of education you successfully completed before attending the NSCC for the first time?
 - 11 Grade 11 or below
 - 12 Grade 12 ()
 - 13 General Equivalency Diploma 12/GED 12 ()
 - 14 Some Community College ()(program: _____)
 - 15 Completed Community College ()
 - (program: _____)
 - 16 Some private training or career college ()
 - 17 Completed private training/career school ()
 - 18 Some university ()
 - 19 Undergraduate university degree or certificate ()
 - 20 Graduate university degree ()
 - 21 Other ()
- specify: _____
3. During the twelve months prior to September 2000, what was your major activity? What occupied your time for most of the year?
 - 22 going to high school ()
 - 23 going to community college, university, or other post-secondary institution ()
 - 24 working ()
 - 25 education and work ()

- 26 household/personal responsibilities ()
 27 illness ()
 28 seeking employment ()
 29 other
 ()specify _____
)

4. Before you enrolled at the campus, did you ever work at a full-time job (more than 30 hours per week)?
 30 Yes ()
 31 No ()

5. Altogether, how many months or years of full-time work experience did you have before enrolling at the campus?
 32 () Months
 33 () Years

6. Use the following 5-point scale (1 means not at all important, and 5 means very important, with 2,3,4 representing degrees of importance in between) to answer the following questions. Thinking back to prior to September, 2000 when you were gathering information and deciding what program of study you would pursue, how important was it that the program...

		not at all important		very important		
34	could be completed in one year?	1	2	3	4	5
35	credits could be transferred to university?	1	2	3	4	5
36	provided general learning?	1	2	3	4	5
37	prepared you for a second level program at the NSCC?	1	2	3	4	5
38	included a work-experience term?	1	2	3	4	5
39	provided specific skills for employment?	1	2	3	4	5

7. Using the same scale (1 means not at all important and 5 means very important), think about when you first enrolled in the program...how important were the following to you?

		not at all important		very important		
40	acquiring the skills needed for a particular job	1	2	3	4	5
41	improving yourself, generally	1	2	3	4	5
42	improving your chances of a good income	1	2	3	4	5
43	preparing for advanced study	1	2	3	4	5

8. What careers do you see as your options after graduation (list the potential jobs you feel that you would be qualified for?)

40 _____
 41 _____
 42 _____
 43 _____
 44 _____

9. What are your starting salary expectations (hourly wages)?

44 \$5.50 to \$8.50 ()
 45 \$8.51 to \$11.50 ()
 46 \$11.51 to \$14.50 ()
 47 over \$14.51 ()

10. Prior to registering in this program, what other options did you consider?

49 university ()

50 private college ()

51 another NSCC program ()

52 work ()

53 other () (specify _____)

11. Was this program your first choice?

54 Yes ()

55 No (), what was your first choice?

(_____)

56 Why were you not able to take the first choice?

(_____)

12. Did you apply to any other educational institutions?

57 No ()

58 Yes, () which ones:

(_____)

13. What source of information was most significant in your decision to enroll in the business

program at the NSCC?

59 high school counselor ()

60 family member advice ()

61 information from friends ()

62 information from the college ()

other ()

(Specify: _____)

14. Did you consider enrolling in OIT instead of BIT? Yes () No ()

64 Why or why not?

(_____)

_____)

For background purposes...

15. What is the highest level of education completed by your father or male guardian?

65 (_____)

16. What is the highest level of education completed by your mother or female guardian?

66 (_____)

17. What was/is your father's or male guardian's occupation?

67 (_____)

18. What was/is your mother's or female guardian's occupation?

68 (_____)

19. Are you the first in your immediate family to attend community college?

69 yes ()

70 no ()

20. Are you the first in your immediate family to attend any post-secondary institution (beyond high school)?

71 yes ()

72 no ()

21. What is your gender?

73 male ()

74 female ()

22. What is your age?

75 age: ()

23. What is your marital status?

76 single ()

77 married or common law ()

78 separated or divorced ()

79 widow or widower ()

24. Do you have children financially dependent on you?

80 yes ()

81 no ()

25. Are you employed while studying at the campus?

82 yes () How many hours do you work each week? () hours).

83 no ()

Thank you for completing the survey! Your individual responses will remain anonymous and confidential.

Appendix 8

Focus Group Fieldnotes: *One question per page. Also, all sessions are audio recorded.*

Focus Group Information

Date	
Location	
Number of participants	
Participant Category	
Moderator	
Asst. Moderator	

Responses to Questions

Q1. What factors were most important in reaching your decision to register for a second year program?

Brief Summary and Key Points	Notable Quotes

Comments and Observations

--

Appendix 9

Odds Ratios for Chapter 10

Odds ratios for NSCC leaving versus continuing to second year (registered)

Predictor	leaving	continuing
Parental Education		
Less than high school	.797	.101
High School	1.000	1.000
Post secondary	.093	1.878
Age		
Over 28	.223	1.691
28	1.000	1.000
under 28	.611	.597
Funding		
Receiving funding	1.101	1.691
Not receiving funding	1.000	1.000
Receiving funding & supporting dependents	.203	1.278
Placement Test Results		
Three exemptions	.005	1.951
Two exemptions	.013	1.901
One exemption	.021	1.886
No exemptions	1.000	1.000
Career & Education Goals		
No career and education goals	.592	1.890
Career goals and education goals identified	.687	1.778

Note:

The contrast groups, where applicable, are indicated by a value of 1.000. Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate an increase in the odds of leaving the NSCC before completing the first year of business. Odds ratios less than 1 indicate a decrease in the odds of leaving. Odds ratios equal to 1 indicate no effect on the odds of leaving.

Appendix 10 (a)
Sample Business Administration Job

April 25, 2002

Summer REIT

DATA ADMINISTRATOR

equivalent yearly salary \$23,500

Term Position: May 1 to July 31, 2002

Reports to: Director, Management Information Systems

Qualifications:

- Good computer application skills including MS Office, Access, internet based
- Strong key board skills
- Strong organizational skills and very detail oriented
- Able to work independently with a minimum of supervision
- Ideally would have some related real estate industry experience, but not necessary
- Formal IT training in data administration
- Related work experience in maintaining central data bases

Primary Responsibilities:

- Co-ordinate data required in regions/head office database (be "keeper" of MIS requirements for all users)
- Data entry of information in Head Office
- Work as part of a team to determine controls required on data entry in regions. Put checks in place to test accuracy information. Provide direction to regions / Head Office as to correct entry/collection of data
- Update ERV monthly (data feed into the risk management software)
- Update information for the website

Hoped for:

- General network issues
- Report writing in MRI

Appendix 10 (b)

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY NOVA SCOTIA TEACHERS CREDIT UNION LTD MEMBER SERVICES REPRESENTATIVE - I

Full Time Employment Opportunity – MSR I

Job Description:

To provide personalized service to members of the Credit Union regarding services offered such as term deposits, RRSPs, travellers' cheques, money orders, Telpay bill payments, opening and closing accounts, payroll deduction forms, etc. Applicants must have knowledge of Microsoft Word and Excel. As a MSR I, the successful applicant will be required to sell Credit Union products and services, perform teller duties and assume other duties as may be assigned from time to time.

Salary Range:

\$17,419.00 - \$24,888.00 based on applicant skills and experience.

To pursue this position, please submit an updated resume outlining your skills, experience, interests and accomplishments. Please apply in writing to:

**Nova Scotia Teachers Credit Union Ltd.
Attention: Mike Wall
3106 Dutch Village Road
Halifax NS B3L 4L7**

Deadline for applications is 5:00 p.m. June 28, 2002.

We thank all applicants in advance and advise that only those candidates selected for an interview will be contacted.

Appendix 11 **NSCC Graduate Follow Up Survey 2000**

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Business	Certificates	One Year Diplomas	Two Year Diplomas
Number of Graduates	749	215	54
Number of Graduates Returning to NSCC	210	9	1
Survey Sample Size	539	206	53
Number Responding to Survey	289	109	33
Number of Respondents in Labour Force	276	104	30
% of Respondents in Labour Force	96%	95%	91%
Number of Respondents Employed	235	93	26
Employment Rate of Labour Force Participants	85%	89%	87%
Number of Employed in Work Related to Field of Study	182	75	23
% of Employed in Work Related to Field of Study	77%	81%	88%
Number not Employed	41	11	4
Number not Seeking Employment	13	5	3
Average Annual Salary of those Employed Full Time in Work Related Field of Study	\$19,261	\$19,285	\$21,125
Number of Graduates who Pursued Further Education	309	44	8
% of Graduates who Pursued Further Education	41%	20%	15%

Statistics Canada average annual starting income for clerical/administrative position is \$24,000. the range is \$24,000 to \$56,000.

Appendix 12

Attrition Survey: Business Administration, September 2001

Instructions: The survey that you have volunteered to complete will be used as part of my research for my EdD at the University of Bath. Please note that I will need to obtain your scores for the math, communications, and computer exemption tests; therefore, the test is not anonymous. When the results are reported it will be as part of a large anonymous data base and **no names will be used.**

Demographic Data

1. name: _____
2. age: _____
3. gender: _____
4. number of dependent children: _____
5. parent(s) occupation: _____
6. parent(s) education: _____

Education

1. highest level of education completed prior to attending NSCC this year. Please circle only one.
 - high school
 - some university
 - graduated university
 - some community college
 - graduated community college
 - some private college
 - graduated private college
 - other: _____

Exemption Test Scores

1. Math: _____
2. Communications: _____
3. Computers: _____

What are your future plans for education?

What are your future career goals?

Appendix 13

Summary of Survey Results

for BIT students graduating in the Class of 2001

- 56 percent “complete” or graduate
- 47 percent of “completers” enroll in a second level business diploma program
- Average age of “completers” is 27.2
- Average age of “leavers” is 24.6
- Average age for urban campuses “completers” 24.7, “leavers” 22.7
- Average age for rural campuses “completers” 27.7, “leavers” 25.0
- Three largest age segments in the NSCC BIT population for 2001: 20–24 (55 percent); under 20 (19 percent); 25-29 (12 percent)
- 60 percent female, 40 percent male
- 8 percent are from a county outside of the campus location where they are students
- 11 percent of BIT *second year students* (students who have continued on at the College in a second year diploma program) are from a county outside of the campus location
- Less than 5 percent considered a private college as an option to NSCC
- 19 percent of urban students and 27 percent of rural students enter directly from high school.
- Preparation for employment is the most important reason for enrolling for 85 percent
- Fees and location are the next most important reasons for enrolling at 74 percent and 69 percent, respectively. The NSCC Student Marketing Survey, November 2000 where business students ranked “Location” and “Cost” highest when asked to consider which factors had the most influence on their decision to attend the NSCC, corroborates this finding.

- Most students, 52 percent, have decided on a second level program before they enroll in BIT.
- The NSCC calendar was selected as most influential in their decision to enroll in a second year business diploma by 78 percent
- High school teachers and high school guidance counselors have little to no influence on the decisions of students to enroll in business at the NSCC.

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